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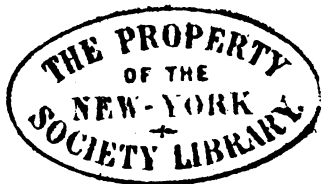
HE WENT FOR A SOLDIER

The Edition of the West for a Soldier
published by Mr. Lovell is the
only one secured in the United
States of America with my sanction.

John Chauce Wright.

Sept 9. 1890.

HE WENT FOR A SOLDIER



BY

~~JOHN STRANGE WINTER~~ pseud. of

AUTHOR OF

"BOOTLES' BABY," "MRS. BOB," ETC., ETC.

H. E. V. (P.) Stannard.

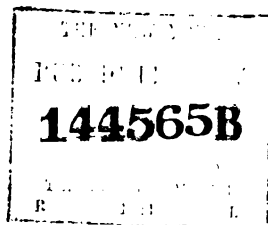
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To

MY FRIEND

MARGARET GRIMSTON

(MRS. C. W. GARTHOENE)

IN REMEMBRANCE OF A DELIGHTFUL TIME SPENT TOGETHER

AT WIX, DURING THE DAYS THAT I WAS
WRITING THIS STORY, I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE

"HE WENT FOR A SOLDIER"

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

*The White House, Wix,
August 18, 1890*

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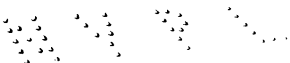


HE WENT FOR A SOLDIER.

CHAPTER I.

CLIVE DARRELL.

The Sixteenth Hussars were quartered at Colchester, and it was during the hot and dusty month of August, when the British soldier of all ranks aches and pines to be anywhere on earth but where he is at that moment; for a barrack square is usually an uninteresting and unlovely spot, and during the drill season work is hard and weather is thirsty, and your officer longs for his seltzer and whiskey, or for a good deep draught of iced beer, and your private thinks wearily of the canteen as a little earthly paradise, where he can find refreshment for his body if not elevation for his soul. I do not



think, take it all round, that Colchester is the liveliest billet in which a soldier can find himself; the town is pretty and quaint and old, and is famed for having the best oysters and the ugliest women in the world, but even those attractions combined do not make it exactly lively. There is very little to do, the shops are not particularly good—I suppose it is too near London for that—and altogether most officers quartered there spend every few hours of leave that they can get in the modern Babylon which we call “Town.”

Well, it was on a broiling August afternoon that the orderly officer for the day—and let me tell you, it is no joke to be orderly officer in a big garrison like Colchester—found himself in possession of the first half-hour of peace and idleness which had been his since he had turned out of his cot at six o'clock that morning.

He was a sociable young man, very young, and not ill-looking; his name, Ronald McNeil, and he was as Scotch as his name. Being Scotch and hardy, or perhaps because he was young to his work as yet, he was not bored out of his life and tired to death, as a



man with three times his length of service would have been at that hour of the day; the only company that bored him was his own, and his first thought on being free for half an hour, was to go and find some of "the fellows."

Not a soul in the ante-room, and of course, at that hour, not a soul in the mess-room. He glanced at *Punch*, and the "Day by Day" in the *Telegraph*, and gave a casual look at the little rack to see if there were any letters for him, although there was no chance of a post at that particular time, and his correspondence was never a voluminous one. And then he took up his whip and settled his cap jauntily over his right eye, and swaggered out into the open again.

He turned to the right when he got out of the Mess, and went as far as the corner of the block of buildings in which the officers' Mess was, and then he stopped short.

"Now I wonder where all the fellows are?" he muttered.

There was, however, not a sign of any one of them. A groom, wearing a light suit which had evidently been his master's, passed

him with a salute, and went into a door of the officers' stables opposite. Otherwise there was not a soul to be seen.

"Oh! I'll go and see if Darrell's in his quarters."

He turned sharply round the corner, and went in at the second door of the row of officers' quarters, passed up the stone stairs, and knocked at the door on the right of the first landing.

"Come in," cried a voice; then added, "Hallo, Shaver, is that you?"

"Yes, are you busy?"

"Not a bit. Thank the Lord I'm on leave," Darrell replied.

"On leave!" echoed McNeil, with a sigh of envy. "You lucky beggar, how did you manage that?"

Darrell laughed. "Why, just the same way that you managed it last week—I went and asked for it."

"Ah!—" then, as if by an inspiration "but then I got mine to go to a wedding."

"Did you? Well, I got mine by honestly saying I didn't feel very well, and that I thought a few days by the seaside would do

me good. But, sit down, Shaver, and have a smoke."

McNeil picked out a cigarette from a small box on the chimney-shelf—yes, a temporary one with a velvet top and a fringe, more or less dingy, such as you always see in officers' quarters—and settled himself in the biggest chair he could find. "Thanks, old fellow, one *is* glad of a cigarette after being on the grind the whole day."

I said before that the young man was not in the least tired, yet he would have died the death before he would have owned as much to one of his seniors in service, who, one and all, were in the regular habit of grumbling and growling from morn till noon, and from noon to dewy eve, on those days when it fell to their lot to be orderly officer. So then he dropped back with a great show of exhaustion, and puffed away at his cigarette with the air of a man who had earned it by hard work.

"By the by, Shaver," said Darrell, presently, "did you go to the wedding last week?"

"Of course I did."

"Whose?"

Young McNeil laughed. "A most romantic affair, I can tell you. The bridegroom was a Colonel Tregillis, the bride a Miss Mildmay; they were engaged twenty years ago."

"Then why the deuce didn't they get married then?" Darrell exclaimed.

"Oh! that's more than I can tell you," McNeil replied. "I only know the outlines of the story. Anyway, they were engaged then, when she was a young girl in her teens, and for some reason he married another woman. This season he came back to English—I mean to England, after having been eight years in India and a widower for eighteen months, and almost the first dinner-party he went to was at my people's; and he was sent in to dinner with her without my mother knowing a word of their story. Wasn't it odd?"

"And now they're married?"

"Yes, they're married. I saw them turned off safe enough."

Darrell sat thinking for a minute. "By

Jove," he exclaimed, "but it's a pretty idea. Is she fit to be seen?"

"Oh, well, a bit getting on, you know," answered the lad, judicially. "Nearly forty, don't you know, and never been married—well, a woman sometimes does get a bit—a bit old-fashioned, don't you know, especially when she's had one man in her head all the time; but still, she's all right enough to have fetched him properly."

Darrell heaved a sigh of relief. "Well, 'pon my word, Shaver, it's awfully pretty. I'm sorry I didn't know 'em. I'd like to have given them a wedding-present."

"Why, Darrell," cried McNeil, "I had no idea you were so sentimental. I thought you never went in for that sort of thing at all."

"No more I do," answered Darrell, promptly. "I give you my word that I've never been in love in my life. I wish I could fall in love. Here I am, twenty-four years old, and one woman is just the same to me as another woman. I like them all, but I don't seem as if I ever wanted to like one any better than another. And I'm getting so sick of living by myself! I'd give anything to

be married and settled—nice little wife, comfortable home, and all the rest of it.”

“But all the rest of it generally means babies,” objected McNeil, who was only twenty, and had the wisest ideas about the marriage state.

“Yes, I know, but all people don’t have babies; and besides, I do not mind ’em much. But three or four years of this life is enough for any fellow. Do you hear that?” with a gesture toward the next room.

McNeil listened. “Yes—they’ve been knocking all the time I’ve been here. Is the Bootblack having something done to his rooms?”

“Something *is* being done to his rooms,” answered Darrell, with a laugh, “but the Bootblack don’t know of it yet. He will when he comes back to-morrow.”

“What’s on?” asked McNeil.

“Well, you know, the Bootblack is just as stingy as he’s rich, and—he’s as rich as the devil. And it seems that the other day Harris looked into his quarters for something, and being the first time he’d been there he naturally looked about a bit. ‘What on

earth,' said he, 'do you stick your pictures up like that for? Why don't you hang 'em up properly?' For all the pictures were just stood here and there, don't you know—on the chimney-shelf, on the cupboards, and the chests, and so on."

"Well,' said the Bootblack, 'they charge a penny each, barrack damages, for every nail you drive into the walls, so I thought I'd do the brutes out of that, at all events.'

"Very economical of you, Bootblack, I'm sure,' said Harris, and presently strolled out again.

"Well, you know, naturally enough Harris talked about the pictures and the barrack damages and all that a good bit, and Danvers evolved a plan. Scarcely any of the fellows have ever been in the Bootblack's rooms at all—I never have. Have you?"

"Never!" answered McNeil, promptly.

It was a point of honor with him not to have been there, for the Bootblack was an exceedingly unpopular officer, and was more or less consigned to Coventry by his equals, while by his inferiors he was simply detested,

though in their case that feeling could not be marked in the same way.

"Well, Danvers set his wits to work, and as soon as the Bootblack went away, he and half a dozen others set to work with hammer and nails—by the by, it's a dead secret, you know——"

"Oh, of course—I'm as safe as the Bank," returned the lad, without a moment's hesitation.

"Well," Darrell went on, "they bought pounds—oh! stones—very nearly tons of nails and a hammer each, and they're spending every minute of their time hammering nails into the walls. The Bootblack has taken his servant with him, and Mrs. Timmins, his bed-maker, got a new baby the day before he went away, so nobody is responsible. I took a look in yesterday, and they've got the Bootblack's crest and motto in one place all neatly done in inch-long nails, a lion rampant—I don't know if you've ever noticed, Shaver, but money-lenders always seem to run to a lion rampant somehow—and the motto, 'Semper Fidelis,' underneath. *That* another usuring fancy, likewise."

"What a magnificent idea!" gasped the lad, brimful of admiration.

"Yes, it's not bad. Then in another place they're putting 'Welcome,' in another the regimental badge, in another an elaborate monogram J. W. A. B. M—the Bootblack's full initials—and to finish up, two of them are busy with a sort of frieze all round the cornice, or rather just below it. Oh, the Bootblack will have a nice little bill for barrack damages when we leave this. 'Pon my word, poor chap, I'm real sorry for him."

McNeil, however, had no pity for the unfortunate Hebrew who had been so unlucky as to get on the wrong side of his brother officers, and laughed long and loudly over the story of the joke that was being played upon him during his few days of leave. Darrell looked at his watch and jumped up. "By Jove, I must be off," he said, "or I shall miss my train."

"Where are you going, Darrell?" McNeil asked.

"Dovercourt," the other answered.

"*What?*" exclaimed the younger.

"Oh, it's as good as any other place at

this time of year," answered Darrell, with a laugh. "And I spoke the sober truth when I told the Chief I wanted a few days of the sea-air."

CHAPTER II.

LORD CHARLIE'S DOUBLE.

Now, as a matter of fact, Darrell had not spoken quite accurately when he said to McNeil that he was going to spend his few days of leave at Dovercourt, for he went beyond Dovercourt Station, and on to Harwich. And there he found good accommodation and a very fair dinner at the Great Eastern Hotel, after which he went out with a cigarette and strolled along the sea-wall in the direction of Dovercourt.

Between ourselves, it is not half a bad place to spend a few days in. The air is wonderful, so fresh and pure, and the sea-wall is quaint enough for the ordinary mind to take pleasure in. And in Harwich, lost in dirt as it is, there is a smack of the real sea-faring life that is very pleasant to those who love the smell of bilge-water and the

scent of the tarred ropes with which all sea-going craft abound.

Now, Darrell loved the sea and everything connected therewith, and on this hot August evening he sauntered along the almost deserted sea-wall, thoroughly enjoying himself, all alone as he was. And finally, when he had got round the point where the lighthouse stands, he sat down upon a jutting stone, the better to drink in the salt sea-air which he had come to seek. And as he sat there he became aware that he was being closely watched by two pairs of keen blue eyes, and also that he was being discussed by the owners of them.

"No, Georgie, I tell you it isn't," said one clear young voice—that belonged to a girl of about eleven years, who had a tangle of burnished fair curls, and looked like a Jack Tar in a kilt.

"Yes, it is, Kitty. I know him quite well," persisted the boy, Georgie, who might have been a year or two younger.

"Nonsense," returned the girl, in quick, decided undertones. "You haven't seen Lord Charlie for more than two years, and

that isn't him. He's like him, I admit," she added ; " but Lord Charlie's nose is bender out than that gentleman's."

" It *is* Lord Charlie," insisted Georgie, stubbornly.

Darrell began to think it was time to put the boy's doubts at an end. " Come here, my man," he called out in his pleasant voice.

The boy came to him readily, followed rather unwillingly by the girl, who kept at a little distance from them. " Yes, sir," said Georgie.

" Do you think I am somebody you know ? " Darrell asked.

" Yes, I thought you were Lord Charles West," the boy replied. " But my sister, Kitty, says she's sure you're not him—and—and—I think so too now."

Darrell laughed outright. " My man," he said, " you are not the first who has taken me for Charlie West ; but I am not him, though I know him very well."

" Oh, do you really ? " and George pressed close up to his knees and looked at him eagerly. Kitty, too, came a little nearer, a

little triumphant that she had been proved right.

"Do you know Lord Charlie?" she said; "are you his brother?"

"No, I am not his brother. My name is Darrell, Clive Darrell of the Sixteenth Hussars, very much at your young ladyship's service," and he took off his hat with an air of ceremony such as made Kitty feel inches taller and years older.

"How do you do?" she said, with a grave little bow which nearly sent Darrell into convulsions. "You would like to know our names too, I dare say?"

"Very much," said Darrell, with quite a proper show of interest.

"Mine is Kitty—for Katherine, you know; and Georgie's is George Esmond—Esmond was his godfather's name, Sir Ralph Esmond of Esseldine. And our surname is Stephenson-Stewart, but we are always called Stewart, you know."

"Stephenson-Stewart," Darrell repeated. "Why, let me see, I know the name, surely. Is your father in the Tenth Dragoons?"

"Yes," delightedly; "*that's* our father."

Do you know him? Did you ever meet him?"

"Yes, I have just met him. I don't suppose he would remember me, though. Let me see; he is Major, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is Major—Brigade-Major at Aldershot. We are not with the regiment now."

"Really. Then is your father here? You must introduce me again to him."

"No, father isn't here. But my sister Leila was very ill this summer, and the doctors said she was to come here, or, at least, on this coast; so we all came."

"With your mother?" Darrell was getting interested in the pair.

"Oh, we haven't a mother," answered Kitty, in an everyday tone, such as told Darrell that their mother had not died very recently. "We came with nurse, our old nurse that we always had, you know, and Miss Douglas."

"I see," said Darrell. "And Miss Douglas—who is she?"

"She lives with us," Kitty answered, "and she teaches us too. She's a dear—we love her."

"How very nice for Miss Douglas," said Darrell, with a smile.

"Yes, it is rather nice for her," said Kitty, seriously—"for she hasn't any father or mother, or any relations at all. So if she didn't live with us I really don't know what she would do."

"But we don't do lessons at Dovercourt," chimed in Georgie. "Father's very last words were 'Now, do let them all run wild, and I'll come down whenever I can get a couple of days off.'"

At this moment a small procession appeared in sight, consisting of a Bath chair, in which reclined a young girl much bundled up in furs, and evidently recovering from an illness; an old man was dragging the chair, and an elderly woman walked behind, while beside it there came a tall girl dressed in blue serge, with a sailor hat upon her smooth dark head—a girl with a proud carriage of the head and a pair of gray, smiling eyes set with the blackest of lashes.

"Here is Leila," Kitty exclaimed, "and that is nurse behind, and Miss Douglas walk-

ing by the side." Then before Darrell could speak, she flew to the others.

"Oh, Joan!" she said, "you must come and speak to this gentleman. He spoke to us, because we thought he was Lord Charlie—at least, Georgie did, I didn't," she added, suddenly remembering the exact facts of the case.

Darrell got up and took off his hat. "Really I must apologize to you," he said, "but the temptation to talk to them was irresistible, and——"

"And he knows father!" Kitty cried.

"No, no. I said that I had met him," rejoined Darrell, quickly. "One can hardly call that knowing him. I know of him, of course, being an army man myself," to the tall girl.

She smiled frankly. "I don't think there is any harm done," she said, looking at him and speaking in a bright tone. "And I don't wonder at Georgie's mistake, for you are like Lord Charles."

"I know it—and so does he," said Darrell, thinking of the many mistakes about which he and Lord Charles had compared notes.

"I do not wonder," pleasantly, and preparing to walk on.

"You said," said Kitty to Darrell, "that if father was here, I was to introduce you again to him; but if I introduce you to Joan it is the same thing, isn't it? Joan, this is Mr. Darrell, of the Sixteenth Hussars."

Miss Douglas bent her head, and Darrell took off his hat again. The girl felt that it was rather an awkward situation, and made the best of it.

"If you are staying here," she said, graciously, yet a little stiffly too, "I dare say you will see Major Stewart; he is coming next week."

"I have only a few days leave," Darrell answered; "but I hope that he will come before I go."

"Oh, yes. We must say good-by now."

She bent her head and, by a gesture, intimated to the old man that he was to go on, but the two children lingered to take the most affectionate leave of their new friend.

"We shall be sure to see you again," said Kitty, "because we go on the front several times a day. Miss Douglas cannot bear the

other end, where the Retreat is; so we are always here, you know."

"I shall be sure to look out for you," said Darrell.

"But perhaps you like the Retreat end," Kitty suggested.

"I loathe it," answered Darrell, promptly.

"Come, Kitty — come," Miss Douglas called from a little distance.

"Yes, yes. Good-night, Mr. Darrell, I'm so glad we took you for Lord Charlie;" and then hand in hand the two sped away after the Bath chair, which was slowly disappearing in the direction of Dovercourt.

Darrell sat down on the ledge of stone again and lighted a fresh cigarette. "What a nice girl," his thoughts ran—"and she's a governess. They're out of the common nice children, though—but for her to be a governess—oh! it's a beastly shame—a beastly shame!"

CHAPTER III.

"WHEN ADAM DELVED," ETC.

The following morning Darrell, after the manner of soldiers, was up betimes, and had a swim before breakfast, at which he appeared looking so radiant and so thoroughly wholesome, that more persons than one turned to look after him as he passed up the room, and more than one inquired of the waiter who the gentleman in very light clothes was.

The reply of that functionary was thoroughly characteristic: "He's a Mr. Darrell," he said, briefly, "from Colchester."

"Is he an officer?" one lady asked.

"Something of that sort," returned the waiter, vaguely; "he sent a telegram to the cavalry barracks last night after he got here."

Meantime, Darrell had got the morning

paper and was busy doing ample justice to the good meal before him, and when that was done he strolled out again with a view of studying the rank and fashion of Dover-court. For this purpose he walked along the sea-wall, disregarding the many seductive invitations he received on the way to try his fortune—for the consideration of one shilling—upon the briny deep. On he walked until he had passed right through the gay little watering-place and had reached the wooden palace at the extreme end of it, that part which the trippers love, and where you may ride a donkey for almost any price if you choose to bargain, swing yourself in a huge swing with the help of a stout rope, and indulge in other violent delights of a like nature; where you may sit on the sand and study the manners and customs of the people, the backbone of England, or go within the palace and regale yourself with tea and shrimps at sixpence and ninepence a head.

“Rigg’s Retreat,” read Darrell from the wall above the entrance to the wooden palace. “Why, that must have been what my friend Kitty was talking about. By Jove!

I should think Miss Douglas did not like it—it's scarcely her form."

He retraced his steps then and walked back along the cliff, turning into the bit of spa where you have to pay a trifle for admittance. And just as he got down on to the level ground he almost knocked over Kitty Stewart, who was running across his path.

"Oh, it's Mr. Darrell," she said. "Good-morning. Joan, here is Mr. Darrell."

It must be owned that Mr. Darrell felt himself somewhat in a dilemma—he did not wish to snub the child's friendly and innocent advances by simply taking off his hat and walking on, and yet he naturally did not wish to seem to be forcing himself upon a girl who was a total stranger to him. In truth, he hardly knew what to do, and his looks showed it plainly.

Miss Douglas, however, secure in having the constant support of the staid old nurse, was quite at her ease. "Good-morning," she said, civilly.

"Mr. Darrell," cried Georgie, "Kitty and I are going down on the sands to make a castle—will you go too?"

Darrell looked at Miss Douglas in perplexity.

"Don't let them bother you," she said, in answer to his look.

"It's not that," he replied—"of course it's not that—only look here, Miss Douglas, I can't give you any more guarantee of my identity than to give you my word that I am, as I told the children last night, Clive Darrell, of the Sixteenth Hussars, and if you don't feel quite comfortable about it, please tell me, and I'll go over to Felixstowe this afternoon and keep out of your way."

His tone was so low that nobody else heard him, and Miss Douglas looked up into his eyes and spoke as frankly as he had done.

"Well, Mr. Darrell, it is rather an unconventional way of making an acquaintance, I admit; but to tell you the truth, I have heard of Lord Charlie's double so many times that I do not feel as though you were a stranger to us. So I think, if it does not bore you to talk to the children a little, there won't be any harm in it."

"You are very kind," he said; "and may

I say, very sensible? Thank you very much; it will give me so much pleasure to talk to the youngsters a little—I am very fond of children.”

Miss Douglas smiled, and gave him a little bow, and sat down beside the invalid's Bath chair as if the conversation was now quite at an end. Darrell, however, had something else to say, and said it, although Georgie had taken possession of his stick and Kitty of his arm, with the assured air of friends of long standing.

“I have not asked after the invalid this morning,” he said; “and Kitty, you have not introduced me to your sister.”

“Oh! I'm *so* sorry,” Kitty cried. “This is my sister Leila. Leila—Mr. Darrell.”

Darrell took off his hat to the child, who flushed with pleasure at the honor—for it is an honor and a huge pleasure to any girl-child to have a man show her the ordinary courtesies that he shows to a grown-up young lady.

“You are better this morning?” he asked, gently.

“A little better,” she answered—she was

more shy than Kitty—"but I was very ill."

"Oh, very ill!" said Miss Douglas, gravely; "but"—more cheerfully—"we are well on the mend now, are we not, darling?"


"Oh! yes, Joan," smiling at her.

And after that Kittie and Georgie took full possession of their new friend, and Darrell spent the next two hours at the hardest work he ever remembered to have toiled at in all his life. How he dug and delved, and how his back ached, and how the sweat of honest labor, of which there would be no result, dropped from his brow until his face was like a fiery furnace, and he would have given a sovereign for a tumbler of beer with a head on it!

And was it all for no result? was it all for the love he had for the children? Well, to tell the truth, I very much doubt it. I think a certain pair of gray, gray eyes had something to do with his sudden inspiration to toil for the pleasure of others; and the worst of it all was that when the castle was finished, and his watch warned them that it was time to go home for luncheon, he came

on to the wall again with the youngsters, only to find that Miss Douglas had gone home with the invalid, leaving the old nurse with her knitting to wait patiently until half-past one should come. When Darrell realized that *she* was gone, and that all his self-sacrifice had been thrown away, I am afraid he bade a very hurried farewell to his friends Kitty and Georgie, and went back to his hotel with thunder upon his brow and war in his heart. But Clive Darrell had not wasted either the time or the toil, for the children had become his staunch friends forever.

And mind, there is something very real and true about the love of a child. Look back over your own life, and note the feeling that you have for the grown men and women who were your friends—your very own real intimate friends then! Have your feelings for them ever altered? Has your love for them ever changed! I don't think so. I know, for my own part, I had a dear, dear friend in the days of my first decade. He was an Indian Judge; his name was Richard. He bought me "The Mysteries of Udolpho," and all the best things that I possessed



at that time. He used to tell me the story of “Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogen,” and frighten me out of my wits, and I used to call him “Mr. Dick” sometimes, to his intense disgust. Dear, dear! I wonder where you are now, my dear Richard W——! If you are alive and ever see these lines, I wonder if they will recall your child-friend, who is getting on in years now, but who loves you just the same, just the same as all those years ago.

No, nothing that you do for a child is wasted, and those two hours which Darrell spent with the children were not wasted either, for they went home to the furnished home in Orwell Terrace, and they sang his praises to Joan Douglas, until she too caught the infection and felt quite a thrill of pleasure that she had been able to discriminate between the right sort and the wrong, and that she had been gravely gracious to Lord Charlie’s double, instead of sending him about his business with a stony glare of outraged propriety.

So when next they met, which was late in the afternoon of that day, she was quite

pleasant and friendly with him. She kept Kitty's hand tightly through her arm, and Kitty's slim young person between them. But nurse was not there, for the invalid had a slight headache and the nurse had stayed within doors to take care of her, and Darrell felt that to be allowed to walk on beside Miss Douglas was a distinct advance in the right direction.

He was surprised to find how well-informed she was, not on those subjects which we call book learning—for that one expects in a governess—but in all those ways which such men as him call life. She seemed to have been everywhere, to have done everything—to have had, in fact, quite a lovely time, as a girl would express it.

And Kitty hung upon her arm in sweetest friendliness, and supplied considerable data as a supplement to their conversation.

"Joan, don't you remember when father took us to so-and so?" Or, "Joan, it wasn't then, it was during father's last long leave, when we all went to Paris."

It was very strange, and then, even as they walked along, a horrible thought presented

itself to him—a thought which accounted for the governess of a man like Stephenson-Stewart living the life of a young lady of fashion—"Evidently Stewart means to marry her himself."

CHAPTER IV.

GETTING ON.

It must not be supposed, however, that this idea prevented our friend Darrell from making what way he could with Miss Joan Douglas. After that first little walk, when she had been so careful to keep Kitty between them, it came to be quite an accepted state of affairs that he should go, whenever he took his walks abroad, in that direction where he was to all intents and purposes perfectly sure of finding them, that is to say, of finding Miss Douglas and the Stephenson-Stewarts. They were always somewhere on the front, for at Dovercourt there is not much temptation to get off the actual coast, unless you happen to be of the class which considers "an airing" as an indispensable part of a sojourn at the seaside. In the neighborhood of Dovercourt you see the particular form of

cruelty to animals which an "airing" often involves in great perfection; for if you take a drive along any of the roads within four or five miles of the little watering-place, you may meet as many as a dozen parties within an hour. They are nearly all alike, a heavy wagonette packed full of people, drawn by a very small, starved-looking, and generally permanently lame pony—no, not a horse, nor yet a cob—a *pony* of twelve or fourteen hands only. The road is an up-and-down sort of road, if not actually hilly, but nobody ever seems to dream of getting out and walking.

The day before yesterday I saw such a party at Oakley Street, a village four miles from Dovercourt. There was the usual wagonette, the usual wretched lame pony, and the load consisted of eight full-grown persons, five of them the fattest women I ever saw, women who wore dolmans and *sat solid*. Besides these there were four biggish children and three babies in arms! A few yards further I met a much larger party on their way back to Dovercourt, but it is true that their "gee" was almost a cob.

“Oh!” you would ask, “are there no police in the neighborhood?” Certainly there are. In almost every village excepting ours you may find a small cottage with a little blue plate above the door bearing upon it in white letters the words “County Police.” I fancy, though, that the police go hay-making or harvesting—anyway they never interfere with the “airing” fiends. They tell me that it would be no good if they did—that there are no local by-laws or regulations concerning the numbers which vehicles may carry, and that drivers of such conveyances may do exactly as they like so long as the Cruelty to Animals people do not come down upon them. But I do wish that the Cruelty to Animals people would look at their map of Essex and take notice that there is such a place as Dovercourt, and also take my word for it that, during the summer months, that particular place would be all the better for a little attention from them.

Happily, the young Stephenson-Stewarts did not crave for little jaunts along the country lanes, and generally remained on

the sea-front. Generally, too, Darrell remained with them, although he did not after that first morning give himself exclusively up to the work of constructing castles of sand. He told Kitty that he had overworked himself on the previous morning, and was afraid he had got a permanent crick in his neck which, unless it passed off, would certainly be the means of ending his career of glory as a soldier in Her Majesty's service.

And Kitty was dreadfully concerned. She insisted upon his sitting down by Joan and Leila, and keeping himself very, very quiet, and then, having given him a bit of toffee from a private store in her pocket, she carried Georgie off to look among the rocks for shell-fish—preferably cockles.

"It's very good of Kitty to billet me so comfortably," Darrell remarked to Miss Douglas, as the children disappeared over the edge of the sea-wall.

"Oh! Kitty is very tender-hearted," Miss Douglas replied, with a certain dewy tenderness about her eyes which went near to finishing the havoc she had already made of his heart.

"Kitty is the most charming little lady that it has been my pleasure to meet for some time," returned Darrell, promptly. "I only hope she has not inconvenienced you by her care for me."

Miss Douglas looked aside at him with her wonderful gray eyes and laughed. "I think you are one of the most diffident men I ever met, Mr. Darrell," she said.

"Well, you wouldn't like it if I wasn't—under the circumstances?" he said, questioningly.

"No, I should not—that is quite true," she answered, "but all the same, I may as well tell you that I felt a little—a little uncertain the other night, as to what I ought to do; you see, I don't generally pick up acquaintances through the children. But it was so odd their taking you for Lord Charlie, who is quite a great friend of theirs, or rather who was so two years ago, and then my seeing the likeness, and you being a friend of his, and altogether the circumstances were peculiar. So I sent a telegram to Major Stewart that evening, saying, 'The children have made friends with a Mr. Clive

Darrell, Sixteenth Hussars. Is it all right?' and this morning I have had his answer."

"Yes—and he says? Miss Douglas, I give you my word I never felt so anxious in my life," Darrell said, and in truth he looked so.

She drew a letter out of her pocket and spread it upon her knee. Darrell, without wishing to look at it, saw out of the tail of his eye that it began "My dear Joan." "He says this"—Miss Douglas said, reading from it—"I think it is all right about Darrell. I met him once at dinner at the Sixteenth mess. He seemed a very popular young fellow, and is so wonderfully like Charlie West that I thought at first it was him.' So you see," folding the letter and leaning back against the rough-hewn stones behind her, "though it was rather an unconventional introduction, it is practically the same as if somebody neither of us knew intimately had said, 'Mr. Darrell, Miss Douglas.'"

"Thank Heaven for that," ejaculated Darrell, fervently.

And after this it was wonderful how well

they got on, how really friendly he became with them. He was good and thoughtful for the children too, although he did not dig and delve for them again—he took them out twice in a sailing-boat, and he treated them to various pleasures, new spades, donkey rides, buckets, and other joys dear to a child's heart.

And to the delicate little Leila, whose pleasures for the present were necessarily of a very limited kind, he made life very much brighter by little gifts of books and papers and fruit, by sitting patiently down and telling her of things that interested her, and so helping her to bear the tedious weariness of a slow recovery. And for reward he had the fact that Joan Douglas was always there, and sometimes he had long talks to her when the others were not by. Surely, surely, never so much quiet delight was got out of one week's leave before.

On the third morning he began to tell Leila and Joan about the trick that some of his brother officers had been playing upon the one whom they called "The Bootblack."

"But why do you call him 'The Boot-black?'" Leila inquired

"Well, it is rather a libel on bootblacks in general, I admit," Darrell replied. "I can't quite go into all the details, but this man happens to be very unpopular, and nobody speaks to him except officially; excepting, that is, on very rare occasions."

"Pleasant for him," murmured Joan. "What is his name?"

"His honored name is Moses," Darrell replied.

"Oh! then he is a Jew?"

"Well, he is, but it isn't for that reason that he's been sent to Coventry—oh, not a bit of it. But he's a regular bounder—"

"What's a bounder?" inquired Leila.

Darrell cast an apologetic glance at Joan. "Really, Miss Douglas, I beg your pardon," he said. "My child," he went on to Leila, "I ought not to have said that to you. But this Mr. Moses is a very disagreeable person, who does everything he can to make all the others dislike him. And as he won't leave the regiment, we have sent him to Coventry instead. He is very rich and very stingy, and as he would not hang his pictures up in his rooms because he would have to pay a

penny each for the nails as barrack-damages, some of the fellows have taken considerable trouble to ornament his walls for him ;” and then he went into the details of the whole story, so far as he knew it.

“I had a letter from Harris this morning,” he continued, when he had told his story up to the time of his going on leave ; “Harris is a great friend of mine, and was the first to start the idea, though unintentionally ; and he tells me—but I’ll read you his letter.”

He took three or four letters from his breast-pocket and selected one from among them. “The Bootblack came back from his leave last night. We were all at mess. We didn’t know what time he was coming until he burst into the mess-room like a tornado or a whirlwind, and blurted it all out to the Colonel. The Colonel heard him patiently till he had to stop for breath.

“‘You have not apologized for your morning clothes, Mr. Moses!’” he remarked, mildly.

“‘My clothes!’”—and here Darrell coughed and elaborately omitted a word or two—“‘I tell you, Sir,’ he almost shrieked,

'I left my rooms open, thinking I was among *gentlemen*,' with a withering look around, 'and I've come back to find thousands of nails hammered into my walls.'

"'You would not expect to find them glued, would you?' the Colonel inquired, mildly.

"'I shall have a penny-a-piece to pay for them,' yelled the Bootblack.

"'I'm afraid you will, Mr. Moses,' said the Chief very gently, 'but may I ask why you had them put in?'

"'I did not—I—I—it's those brutes,' he screamed.

"'Well, well, you must not be hard on them,' said the Colonel, soothingly. 'The tradesman is very much at the mercy of his workpeople, and workpeople don't have the finest brains in the world, or they would not be workpeople at all. I always find it the safest plan to give a written order——' but you know the way the dear old Chief twaddles on when he gets started."

"I should think I do," commented Darrell, with a laugh.

"Well, at last the Bootblack made the

Colonel understand that the new decoration of his rooms had been done without his knowledge or consent, and on hearing that the old Chief stiffened all over in a moment.

“‘Have you any evidence that it was done by your brother officers, Mr. Moses?’ he asked.

“‘Evidence! Why, there’s the nails, Sir,’ cried the Bootblack, ‘thousands of them. Surely that’s evidence enough for anybody.’

“‘I am afraid,’ said the Colonel, ‘that a dead body is not considered sufficient evidence on which to hang a man for murder, without some more definite evidence to fix the guilt of it on him. You can report your grievance to me officially if you like—but I strongly advise you not to do so, as unless you can bring me actual evidence, I can, of course, do nothing in the matter. And I am afraid you will have to pay for the barrack damages all the same.’

“The Bootblack fairly groaned.

“‘The fellows who did it are all here,’ he said. ‘They can’t deny it. You ask them, Sir.’

“You should have seen the Colonel’s face,

Darrell—you would never have forgotten it. He looked like a turkey-cock and a boiled lobster rolled into one. ‘I do not require you to teach me my duty, Mr. Moses,’ he said, in a stiffly-ceremonious tone. ‘I have told you what course you can take, and I have given you the advice which my experience of army life tells me is the best—you can please yourself whether you follow it or not; but we will close this discussion, Mr. Moses, if you please, and confine ourselves to parliamentary language for to-night.’

Darrell broke off short and looked at the two girls with laughing eyes. They were all too well versed in the etiquette of a mess-room not to appreciate the joke to the full.

“You must tell father that when he comes,” said Leila, lying back in her chair limp and weak, poor child, with the exertion of her hearty laugh.

“Yes,” said Joan, “you must certainly tell the Major.”

CHAPTER V.

THE LIGHT OF HIS LIFE.

Major Stephenson-Stewart did not manage to get off from his duties at Aldershot during the few days that Darrell remained at the Great Eastern Hotel, at Harwich. He had intended to do so, but some personage was taken down to Aldershot that week, and, naturally, the Brigade-Major could not be absent just then.

The children were disappointed, but they bore their disappointment with the equanimity which very happy children frequently display upon occasion, and on the Friday afternoon—the day that they had expected their father to come—Darrell stood treats in the shape of donkey-rides to a quite alarming extent, in spite of many remonstrances from Miss Douglas.

“ You ought not to spend so much money

over them," she expostulated—"you are spoiling them dreadfully, and they really victimize you. I am sure the Major would not allow it if he were here."

"But he is not here," pleaded Darrell—"And even if he were, I can't think he would have the heart to deny them a donkey-ride or two. Don't put a stop to their fun, Miss Douglas, and mine."

"But what fun can it be to you to pay for donkey-rides for somebody else?" she asked, opening her eyes very widely at such a novel idea of enjoyment.

"I didn't quite mean it in that way," he replied—"but you see, since you have sprained your foot and cannot walk much, and Leila takes her air with the old duenna to keep her company, a few donkey-rides provide occupation at a little distance for our young friends at an exceedingly cheap rate—and—and I am able to talk to you without interruption of any kind."

Miss Douglas blushed a little. "That must be poor sort of entertainment," she said, looking away from him.

"Oh, very poor!" returned Darrell, with

a laugh which belied the words. "Miss Douglas, do let the youngsters have a good time—and me too."

So Darrell won the day and stayed where he was by Miss Douglas's side, paying for one donkey-ride after another until it was time for them to go in to supper, as they called a somewhat nondescript meal which they had about half-past six o'clock. Lelia had gone in half an hour earlier, and the old man brought the Bath chair back for Miss Douglas (who had turned her ankle on a stone the previous day, and could not do more than hobble a few steps with the help of a good stout stick). Naturally enough it was Darrell's strong arm which helped her from her seat to the chair, and Darrell, who walked back beside her to Orwell Terrace, with his hand resting on the side of the chair, in a very proprietorial sort of way—"You'll come out again this evening, won't you?" he asked, in a persuasive voice.

"Oh! not this evening, I think," she answered, doubtfully.

"I am going back to Colchester to-morrow," he urged.

"But not very early?" she replied.

"Yes, I am going back very early—before eight o'clock."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. You will come out again for a little, won't you?"

"Well, I'll see," with a laugh. "Good-by, anyway."

He went back to the hotel with a light heart enough, and enjoyed his solitary dinner tolerably well. He was sorry that Major Stewart had not been able to come to Dovercourt as he had intended, because he wanted to have a talk to him—he wanted Major Stewart to see him before he went any further with Joan Douglas! For he had several days before fully made up his mind that she was the one woman in the world for him—yes, these things are done pretty quickly sometimes; for instance, my wife and I met one Thursday at noon and the following Monday evening we agreed to run in double-harness for the rest of our lives. Darrell was thinking about her as he ate his dinner, thinking how dignified and gracious she was, what self-reliance there was about her, what quick

wit she had, and how her great gray eyes shone like stars in her pure pale face.

Darrell himself was just the type of man to admire pale dark beauty in a woman, for he was of a fairish complexion, very much sunburnt just then, his eyes were between gray and blue, his features resolutely cut if not very handsome, while in height he was some five feet ten and in figure strong, and broad in the shoulders without being heavy in build. Altogether a very wholesome and personable young man, with beautiful manners and excellent nerves.

She was still in his mind when he had finished dinner and was off again to Dovercourt, for to-night he knew that he would find the little party on the open space just in front of Orwell Terrace, Miss Douglas not being able to get further a-field. Miss Douglas—Joan; why, what a sweet little dignified name it was. How well it went with Douglas, and how well it would go with Darrell one of these days. For he never gave thought for a moment to the possibility that she might not be willing to change her name for his, although still in his heart there lin-

gered and recurred to him, at times, a remnant of that first doubt that Major Stewart might have some intention of marrying her himself. It came back to him then as he walked along the sea-wall, and, having it so recalled to him, he made a point of putting a few leading questions to Miss Douglas upon the subject that evening.

"Their mother is dead, isn't she?" he asked, when the two children had gone for a turn on the parade to keep Leila company.

"Oh, yes."

"Been dead long?"

"About five years."

"Ah!—so long. Then I suppose you never saw her?" he remarked.

"Oh, yes, I knew Mrs. Stewart very well. She was killed, you know."

"Killed! Why, what do you mean?"

"She was killed in an accident. Major Stewart—he was Captain Stewart then—had bought a new pair of horses—such beauties—and the very first time he took her for a drive something happened to frighten them—they were passing a field in which there was some agricultural engine, and this thing

exploded in some way and the horses bolted. They were both thrown out and the carriage utterly wrecked—Captain Stewart's arm was broken and his face fearfully cut and bruised, and Mrs. Stewart never spoke or moved again. Oh, yes, she lived several hours, but it was quite hopeless from the first."

"And I suppose he was dreadfully cut up."

Miss Douglas turned her lovely eyes upon him in astonishment. "*Why*," she began, then changed her tone. "Ah! I forgot, you do not really know him. He was almost heart-broken—he adored her—he has never been the same since."

"Then you think there is no likelihood of his marrying again," said Darrell.

"Major Stewart will *never* marry again, Mr. Darrell," she answered, decidedly. "Some good husbands and wives marry again simply because they are so lonely and so wretched, they marry out of a sort of desperation; but Major Stewart wasn't that kind of husband at all. He was devoted to her—not because he was the sort of man that makes a good husband to any ordinarily nice wife,

but because he adored *her*, her only. He was wrapped up in her—his love for her was a religion—she was the very light of his life, and when she was taken away the light of his life died out forever as far as this world is concerned.”

“Poor chap,” murmured Darrell, under his breath.

“He is just the same with the children—they are *her* children, and he adores them because of that. They are beautiful, winning little souls all three of them, that no one could help loving, but to him they are first and foremost reflections of her. Oh! he will never marry again, never.”

“I can quite believe it,” said Darrell, who, now that his mind was set at rest, felt all sympathy toward the poor fellow who had lost the wife of his heart all in a moment and without warning.

And the next day he went back to his regiment.

CHAPTER VI.

SO NEAR AND YET——

I do not know if I have already said that Major Stewart had taken the furnished house at Dovercourt for three months; but such was the case.

When they—that is, the three children and Miss Douglas—became acquainted with Lord Charlie's double, they had only been in Dovercourt a few days; and after his week of leave was over, Darrell contrived to see a good deal of them, notwithstanding that leave was very difficult to get, and that his Colonel considered that he had done very well in that respect. But he got into a habit of disappearing from Colchester as soon as work was over for the day, and of turning up quietly at the Great Eastern at Harwich, where he ate his dinner and then strolled out in a casual kind of way in the direction of Dover-

court. And there, for a couple of hours or so, he used to sun himself in the light of Joan Douglas's beautiful eyes, and in the morning get up at a really unearthly hour and get back to Colchester in time for "Officers' Call."

And strangely enough, he never happened to see Major Stewart. Twice he came down for a day and night, and twice Darrell happened to be on duty, with a long court-martial during the following day, so that he did not get down to Harwich until late, when he found that Major Stewart had already left.

"It's so odd," he said one day to Joan—"that I have never met Major Stewart yet."

"Yes—so it is, but you see he is very busy just now, and so am I. He says he has never known so many show-people taken down to Aldershot before—all this summer has been spent in showing off, and he does hate it so."

"Oh! yes—we all do. By the by, did you tell him that I came over pretty often?"

"Kitty did," she replied, and even in the gathering darkness he could see the tell-tale color rising in her cheeks.

"Oh! Kitty. And what did he say?"

She laughed outright—"Oh! Mr. Darrell, I can't tell you exactly what he said——" all the same she could have done so to the very letter if she had been so inclined. "How conceited you are! What can it matter to you what he said about you?"

"But it does matter—vitally, as it happens. Tell me what he said——" persuasively.

"He said that, to the best of his recollection, you were not so good-looking as Lord Charlie."

"And he is right enough."

"I don't think so," Joan burst out—then cried "Oh!" and jumping up from her seat, hurried on to catch up the others, who were all walking on ahead.

Darrell perforce quickened his pace and soon came up with her. "Why need you have hurried away like that?" he asked, reproachfully.

"I—I thought they had been long enough without us," she answered, promptly.

"It wasn't kind of you," he went on—"I have had such a tiresome, disagreeable day,

and I was so happy and contented sitting there, and then all in a moment you rush off like that without any reason at all. I call it exceedingly unkind and inconsiderate of you."

They had fallen a little behind the Bath chair again, and Joan, feeling that she might as well have sat still where he was, as he put it, contented and happy, found nothing to say but an inarticulate murmur which Darrell interpreted in his own way.

"Let us sit down again," he said, softly, and Joan, overpowered by the romance of the hour, sat down obediently enough upon the seat that he pointed out to her.

But alas! the spell was broken—on the first seat they had been alone, on the second they were immediately followed by a couple of common-place women, who were keen on the subject of their respective husbands' delinquencies and shortcomings.

"Well, Mrs. Smith," said one—"all that I can say *is* that *I* don't know 'ow you bring yourself to bear it. I don't say but what Mr. Todd 'as 'is faults—goodness knows I should be telling a story if I did—but drink

ing ain't one of 'em. 'Mr. T.'—I says to him times out of count—"it's my opinion that the 'usband ought to have a free 'and—but tell me when you want me to pack up and go, and just come 'ome drunk, and I'll take the 'int.'"

"And we may as well take the 'int too," murmured Darrell savagely to Joan, who, already convulsed with laughter, was but too glad to get up and go back to the people loitering up and down the short parade. And alas and alas! the spell of enchantment which had been over them both a few moments before, was gone forever.

Darrell was dreadfully disappointed, and as he took her hand in parting, half an hour later, he told her that he did not think that he should be able to come again for several days.

"But why?" she faltered.

"Oh! we're awfully hard worked just now," he answered, with a fine assumption of carelessness.

She was turning away when he caught her hand again.

"Would you mind if you did not see me again for a week?" he asked.

“Yes. I should mind.”

“Very much?”

She hesitated a moment—then she turned back to him and answered simply and truly—“Yes, I should mind very much. But why do you ask me, Mr. Darrell? You know without telling just how much I should mind.”

“Joan—” he burst out in a passionate whisper—“my darling—my darling.”

There seemed to be a fate against them that night, for just as the words left his lips Kitty came running up—“Joan, why don’t you ever ask Mr. Darrell to come in?” she asked.

Joan looked at him hesitatingly. Darrell answered for her—“Not until your father is here, my dear little woman,” he said, and then he bent down and kissed her twice—“but thank you, Kitty, for saying that—I’ll not forget it.”

Then he turned to Joan and took her hand. “Good-night, my darling,” he said tenderly, and bending his head, kissed the hand he still held within his own.

But it was Kitty who spoke the last word

to him that night. "Joan," she said, "may I go to the end of the terrace with Mr. Darrell? I want to tell him something."

"If you like," Joan answered, for the place was all very quiet and not a soul was, as a matter of fact, in sight—"I will stand here and wait for you."

"Mr. Darrell," the child said when they had gone half the length of the short terrace—"you are very like Lord Charlie."

"Did you bring me here to tell me that?" he asked, smiling at her in the moonlight.

"No—but you are not only like him to look at, but you like Joan just as he does."

"Does he like Joan?" He liked to use her name, the dear little, soft-sounding name that suited her so well; and the very fact of being able to speak of her so to the child seemed to give him a greater intimacy with them all—"Does he like Joan?" he asked.

"Lord Charlie," Kitty echoed—"why, Mr. Darrell, of course he does," with all the wonder of a child that he did not know the fact.

"But everybody likes Joan," explained Darrell, who did not like to think that one

of his best friends was hard hit in the same quarter as himself.

“Oh! but Lord Charlie worshipped the very ground Joan walked on,” Kitty cried—“Nurse said so. And the very last time he came to see us something happened. I don’t know what it was, but afterward Nurse said that she supposed Joan had given him his answer, and that he was upset about it. I asked Nurse what it was an answer to, but she told me not to trouble myself about it—when I was troubling myself dreadfully about it all the time. I shall never forget,” she went on, “what he looked like when he went away—he cried.”

“Nonsense,” exclaimed Darrell, who did not want to hear, yet did not know how to stop her from saying any more.

“Oh! I don’t mean that he howled,” said Kitty—“but he kissed me before he went, and my face was all wet. And he told me to be good to Joan and that he would love me always. I know,” she ended.

Darrell was silent for a moment or so. “Kitty,” he burst out, “you ought not to have told me that.”

"But why not?"—wonderingly. "It's true."

"Yes, I know—but a great many things are true which are better left unsaid. And I think Charlie West would be very much hurt if he knew that you had told anyone of that."

"But I told Joan afterward," she said, ruefully. "And Joan gave a great sigh and looked so sorry—and then she said, 'Poor Lord Charlie. Well, I couldn't help it.'"

"Well, don't talk of it to anyone else," said Darrell; "and now go in, my little friend, you are keeping Joan waiting."

He watched her till she was safely within the house, and then went back to the hotel with a new idea to think of.

So dear old Charlie West had had a try for Joan Douglas and had failed. Well, well, what a queer world it was. And how strange that he, who was Charlie's double, should win the day. For there was no doubt that he had won it. He had seen the bright blushes on her cheeks, the soft light in her eyes. She had told him that he knew just how much she would miss him if he did not

come again for several days! It was wonderful, wonderful, that of the two men so much alike, she should choose the one who was the least desirable in a worldly sense. It was wonderful; but he was in Heaven at that moment, and he stood looking out over the wide stretch of sea, thanking God over and over again for having kept his heart free and whole, a fit shrine for the sweetest soul that had ever come across his path.

Not, all the same, that Clive Darrell was a man who would be a poor match for any girl. He had come of a good stock—the Darrells of the great banking firm of Darrell, Walton & Clive, great north country bankers, whose business had been carried on for several generations from father to son. And like many such firms, they had married among themselves and had intermarried, and the old name had dwindled down to one or two representatives where once there had been at least a dozen men in the prime of life all more or less connected with the bank and its branches, or occupying the most prominent positions in the county.

But now all that generation had died off (excepting one, an uncle of Clive Darrell's, the present head of the firm), leaving as present representatives several Walton girls, our friend Clive, and two sons of his uncle's, both in the firm with their father.

There had been no question of Clive's going into the firm. He was an only child, and the idol of his father's heart; he had, almost from his babyhood, expressed an intense desire to be a soldier, and therefore his career had always been looked upon as settled. His father had been dead about four years at the time of which I am writing, and Clive Darrell, with a comfortable fortune vested in the business, enjoyed life in the Service on an income of something like three thousand a year. So that he had no hesitation in offering himself where, thanks to Kitty's information, he knew that Lord Charlie had failed.

The following day he went back to Colchester, and the next day he was on duty, and the day after that there was an inspection by the Duke and a huge dinner in the evening, at which he was obliged to put in an appear-

ance, although he was chafing to be off to Harwich to see Joan again.

However duty is duty, and in the Service duty comes before every other consideration; and it was not until the fourth day after parting with Joan that he was able to look forward to going down to Harwich again.

“Clive,” said Harris to him on that fourth morning, “will you go out with me to St. Anne’s? They’ve got a garden-party on this afternoon and want one or two more men.”

“Awfully sorry, old chap, it’s quite impossible,” Darrell answered—“I’m engaged.”

“Oh, all right—I’ll take one of the others,” Harris rejoined—then added to a bystander, when Darrell had got out of hearing—“Old Darrell’s up to something. I wonder what it is.”

“Oh! it’s a woman, of course,” said a very young officer, wisely.

Harris looked at him—“Well, I don’t suppose it’s a baboon, my child,” he said, gravely.

CHAPTER VII.

NEWS !

On the morning of the fourth day the Post-Corporal arrived in barracks at the usual time, and among other letters Darrell received one bearing the post-mark of the town in which the great banking firm of Clive, Walton & Darrell had its headquarters. "From my uncle," Darrell thought, as he noted the handwriting.

So it proved to be. He broke the seal without having any suspicion that it was more than an ordinary letter, although it was certainly not a usual thing for his uncle to write himself upon any matter of business connected with his nephew's property. But as he read down the first page his very blood seemed to turn to water and freeze within him, and all his new-found happiness died in that dreadful moment.

"MY DEAR CLIVE," the letter ran, "We are all in terrible anxiety and trouble, and I feel that it is due to you to lose no time in acquainting you that a dire misfortune is likely to overtake and overwhelm all of us. Our trusted cashier, Waterhouse, absconded the day before yesterday with certainly fifty thousand pounds, and securities to at least twice the value of that sum. On Monday he sent a note down to the Bank saying that he was ill in bed and would not be able to come, and also some instructions for his juniors. Waterhouse had been in our employment for over twenty years, and was our most confidential and trusted servant. We suspected nothing, as he had at times brief attacks of illness, sick-headaches in fact. But this morning, after receiving two more notes from him, a question arose which made it necessary to have his opinion, well or ill, and Jack went up to his house with a view of seeing him. Imagine Jack's horror at finding only two frightened maid-servants, who replied, in answer to inquiries, that Mr. and Mrs. Waterhouse had gone to London for a few days, and that they had merely

left instructions behind them that each morning a note was to be taken down to the bank before ten o'clock. They expected them back in a few days, and knew absolutely nothing more of their movements.

"We guessed, of course, in a moment what had happened—and it is too true; Waterhouse has gone with two or rather three days' clear start—and from what we can determine, after taking a rough estimate, he has taken quite fifty thousand pounds with him, besides the securities which may yet be recovered.

"Of course this is a serious loss at any time, but it happens that two great failures have occurred during the last month, in both of which we are deeply involved, and we are therefore ill able to bear this new disaster. We may weather the storm, but I think it is only right to let you know what *may* happen. If our London bankers prove difficult, I am afraid a great catastrophe is inevitable.

"As you may believe, we are all in a state of the greatest anxiety—but I felt that, as your property is nearly all in the firm, it was right I should let you know immediately.

If anything happens I will wire you at once—I always urged your father not to leave your money with us.

“Your aff. Uncle—

“JOHN DARRELL.”

For ten minutes or so, Clive Darrell sat stunned and speechless. This was the end of his dream! This was the end of his happy life! For four-and-twenty years he had lived, lived, aye every minute of the time, and during the past few weeks he had been happier than during all the rest of the four-and-twenty years. And now it was all over, and he could never dare to dream of Joan Douglas's sweet gray eyes again.

Still, after all, it was no use being down on his luck until the worst had come—it was no use crying out until the blow had fallen. It was just possible that, as his uncle had put it, they might weather the storm yet, and that the old house of Clive, Walton & Darrell might be kept upon its legs.

It was a rich house, and a powerful house; and although a hundred and fifty thousand pounds was a huge sum to lose at one blow,

still banking-houses had been known to stand against bigger losses than that, and why not that of Clive, Walton & Darrell? Oh! after all, he would not be down-cast about it, and he would go down to Harwich all the same. What was the good, he asked himself, of making himself miserable about something that might never come to pass?

But poor Darrell did not remain in this courageous frame of mind very long. Before luncheon was over that day, a telegram was brought to him. He asked permission by a look to open it—and did so under cover of the cloth. Yes, it was the worst, the very worst. It was very brief—telegrams bringing bad news generally are; in fact, it merely said: “Bank stopped payment this morning, JOHN DARRELL.”

Darrell thrust it into the breast of his frock-coat as if it was nothing of any particular moment—but his face had grown so ghastly pale that his next neighbor, Harris, said to him, in a low voice:

“I hope you’ve not got bad news, old chap?”

"Very bad news, I'm afraid," he answered.
"But I'll tell you about it afterward."

However, before he attempted to explain anything to Harris, Darrell went and sought out the Colonel :

"Can you give me a few days' leave, sir?" he asked, abruptly.

The Colonel looked up. "Eh! what! Leave? Why, Darrell, is anything the matter? You look very ill."

"Yes, sir, I am afraid so far as I am concerned that everything is the matter—everything. I'm afraid I'm ruined, Colonel."

"Ruined, my dear lad," the Colonel echoed—"but how?"

Poor Darrell was not two minutes in explaining the situation. "And I feel that I ought to go down and see how things are going," he ended.

"Oh! to be sure—to be sure. My dear lad, I only trust matters may turn out to be not quite so bad as they look just now," and then with a hearty shake of the hand, Darrell felt himself dismissed and free to start as soon as he liked.

His preparations did not take much time to

complete, he needed but a single portmanteau, and his servant was soon at work packing that, while Darrell gave his friend Harris in brief the outlines of what had happened. "Don't say anything about it, old fellow," he said, when he had finished. "They can talk about it to their hearts' content if the worst comes to the worst. It won't matter to me then—I shan't be here to hear them."

"But you wouldn't leave the regiment?" Harris exclaimed.

"I certainly couldn't stay without any income but my pay," Darrell replied.

"But what will you do?"

"Oh! what do all the fellows do who can't keep going any longer and come a cropper?" Darrell retorted. "They go to the wall mostly; but if I have to do that I promise you one thing—I won't go to the wall in sight of everyone; I'll look round for an out-of-the-way place. By Jove," with a hard laugh—"but I never could understand the poor devil who turns up at the coach whenever we show at a race-meeting—you know the man—Hillier—Hillyard—a name like that. He always hangs about waiting to be

asked to lunch—poor devil, I don't believe he ever tastes a glass of champagne now except he gets it that way, and his clothes are the personification of seediness."

"I know him—Hilldon his name is," Harris rejoined. "How did he come to grief—do you know?"

"Oh! yes. He joined the regiment with a fortune of twenty thousand pounds, and he stayed two years living at the rate of about twelve thousand a year. It must have been immense fun while it lasted—but that sort of thing does not last long—unfortunately for those who try it."

"Well, you have nothing of that kind to reproach yourself with," said Harris, quickly.

"No, that's true. It would have been just as well, though, if I had spent my full income, for I banked with my own people and my savings as well as my capital will go, I suppose, in the general smash," Darrell said—then added bitterly—"but when my coat is as seedy as Hilldon's, who will care a hang about that?"

"Don't talk like that, old chap," cried

Harris. "We shall all care, all of us; and it *does* matter whether a man comes to grief through a sheer misfortune or because he has gone the pace like the devil."

Darrell turned a very white and haggard face upon his friend.

"God bless you, old chap, you do keep a fellow's heart up. I won't forget it, whatever happens. And now I must write a letter and then be off."

"Shall I go to the station with you?" Harris asked.

"Just as you like, old fellow."

"Then I'll go. I'll be ready as soon as you are."

Harris marched off to change his uniform for plain clothes, and Darrell sat down to write his first letter to Joan Douglas—his first, and likely enough his last.

"DEAR MISS DOUGLAS," he began, after writing "Dear Joan," and thinking that it looked too familiar—"I had intended to go down to Harwich this afternoon, but have just had a very important business telegram in consequence of which I have to go into

the North of England at once. I am just off.

“My love to my friends Kitty and Georgie .
—my good wishes and remembrances to Leila
and to you.

“Yours always faithfully,

“CLIVE DARRELL.”

It was a pitiful letter, but it was the best he could write just then in his excitement and misery; so he sent it off thinking that it would explain his absence without in any way worrying Joan, and never dreaming that it would fall with the chill of ice on the girl's heart, causing her twenty times more uneasiness and anxiety than she would have felt had she known the exact truth—that it was only a question of money which had called him away; that he had spoken the actual truth when he had told her he was so happy and contented that last evening at Dovercourt; that his passionate whisper “My darling—my darling” had been from his very heart where she reigned supreme over all with never a rival to give her inquietude even for a moment.

And when Darrell closed the envelope, he felt as if he had grown ten years older in the last half-hour, so old and so hopeless, quite hopeless, for hope was dead.

CHAPTER VIII.

“MESSRS. CLIVE, WALTON & DARRELL.”

Clive Darrell went straight to Town from Colchester, and after getting a mouthful of dinner (for which he had naturally enough no appetite), he hastened off to King's Cross to catch the train for the North. And he arrived at Millchester—the town where Clive, Walton & Darrell had flourished for so many years—during the early hours of the morning. He went no further than the Station hotel, where he tumbled into bed and fell into a profound and dreamless sleep, from which he did not awaken until nine o'clock in the morning, when he got up feeling like another man, and after a cold bath went down to breakfast in the coffee-room feeling quite like himself again.

The morning was bright and fair—and really it seemed sinful to be in bad spirits,

aye, or in bad circumstances after such a good breakfast and while the sun shone in the heavens above and the air seemed all alive with light and life. You see, Clive Darrell had never known what it was to be in bad circumstances, and the mere fact that his fortune had been entirely swept away had as yet no meaning for him—it was only a phrase. As it was with him then, hope soon sprang again within him, and as he walked along toward the Bank he almost persuaded himself that it was all a horrid dream which had scared him terribly, but which he would soon be able to laugh at as an excellent joke.

For one thing, nothing seemed changed about the place since the last time he had been there—he met the same stout solemn old gentlemen pottering steadily along to their several places of business as he had known from his boyhood, though they had not been so old then or perhaps quite so solemn, and neither so stout nor so pottering in gait. And when he came to the club, there in the big bow-window overlooking the river, was old General Scannerman, who had fought at Waterloo and had lived in that big bow-

window ever since Darrell could remember anything. He found himself smiling then, as he remembered how a few years before he had wondered with all his might where did the old gentleman sleep at night?

And then the tall tower of the Abbey came into sight; the bells were ringing for morning-prayers and the smart little choir-boys with their narrow white frills round their throats, were just trooping in at their own little door next to that entrance which led into the vestry. And then Darrell turned down the High Street and presently came in sight of the old-fashioned red-brick house known as "The Bank"—a long substantial building with a large handsome door in the middle of it, and with three large windows on either side and a row of seven windows in the story above. And as soon as his eyes fell upon the house his heart went down to zero, for he realized in an instant that the evil tidings had been true enough.

For the door was closed—the stout outer door, that is—instead of being left, as was usual, wide open disclosing the wide swing-doors within with their plate-glass panels and

their handsome brass finger-plates. And on the door was fastened a paper on which something was written that three or four people were lingering to read. Darrell stopped also, unconscious of the fact that one of the loiterers, having recognized him, had nudged his companion to look at one of the young Darrells. And this was what he read—"Messrs. Clive, Walton & Darrell regret that they have been compelled to suspend payment, owing to certain recent failures and to the sudden disappearance of their chief cashier."

It was a bitter moment for poor Darrell ! He felt very much as one might imagine that the Prince of Wales's children might feel if they were suddenly told that her Majesty had been deposed and might for the future think herself lucky if she could earn a decent living say as laundress to Mr. Bradlaugh ! One can imagine no two ends of a stick so far apart as that, I think, and in fact, to Darrell life at that moment was like a revolution—and revolutions fall with cruel hardship on some. However, it was no use standing there staring at that pitiful announcement in

his uncle's handwriting, and he turned sharply round the corner and knocked at the door on the side, that was used as an entrance to the private part of the house.

A maid-servant whom he did not know came in answer to his summons. "I am Mr. Clive Darrell," he said—instinctively guessing that he would find it difficult to get admittance unless he gave his name at once—"is anyone here?"

"Yes, sir—Mr. Darrell himself is here," the girl replied—"and both Mr. Jack and Mr. Bertram."

She made way for him to go within and led him to a room on the ground-floor where she asked him to wait. And after five minutes or so Jack Darrell, his cousin, came to him.

"Well, Jack, old fellow," he said.

Jack nearly wrung his hand off: "Clive—dear old chap, I'm so glad you've come. The governor has been worrying all the morning because he hasn't heard from you. He quite expects a storm of reproaches from you—but it isn't his fault, Clive, I assure you."

"My dear old Jack—" cried Clive, and

I ought to tell you that all the Darrells were clannish and exceedingly fond of one another—"he ought not to have thought that of me. It's my fault, I know, I ought to have wired at once; but, on my word, the news so knocked the wind out of my sails, that I never gave it a thought—I didn't indeed."

"Well, come and see him and set his mind at rest on that score," said Jack—then at the door he turned back and put his hand on his cousin's shoulders—"Clive, old fellow, it's a devil of a mess we're in—there'll be no getting out of it, no saving anything out of the wreck, I fear."

"Well, it can't be helped—" said Darrell, his heart aching for the pain in the other's eyes.

"If you had seen my father last night—Clive, old fellow, I know it will fall hard on you, the hardest of any of us because you might have got out of it at any time—but if you had seen him last night, you would have pitied him with all your heart."

"So I do," Clive cried.

"That's good of you, Clive; of course it's

the roughest on Bertram, married less than a year and—but there, Bert's young and strong, and his wife loves him and stands up like a little brick about it. It's my father I'm thinking of—he's too old to bear being torn up by the roots."

"Take me to him," said Clive, who could scarcely keep the tears out of his eyes.

So together they went to Mr. Darrell's private room, where the old man, who had held his head so high and had helped the poor and needy far and near, sat trembling to await the nephew whose fortune had gone in the wreck of the great house.

Some instinct made the old man rise from his chair, as if he felt he had no longer the right to sit in the presence of those who must suffer with him. His son Bertram was with him, standing behind his chair, tall and haughty, ready to do battle if need be against one who had always been the best of friends with him. A needless precaution—when Clive Darrell caught sight of the drawn, shamed old face that had always smiled so kindly on him, he made a rush toward him and caught him in his arms with

a cry of "My dear uncle, my dear, dear uncle ——" and the next moment John Darrell, head of the once great house, had bent his white head upon the young man's shoulder and was sobbing like a child.

But—although John Darrell's eyes followed his nephew about here, there, and everywhere, and Jack clapped him on the back and swore that he knew, had known all along, that Clive would be old Clive to them all whatever happened; and although Bert's stiffness melted away in one moment, and he got hold of his cousin's hand and wrung it hard without saying a word, simply because he could not control himself sufficiently to speak just then; and though little Mrs. Bert, scarcely more than a bride, came with her pretty eyes red with tears, and put her arms right round his neck and kissed him, whispering to him that God would make it up to him one day, she was certain of it—still, so far as he personally was concerned, Clive Darrell was just where he was, and that was neither more nor less than penniless. Well, if not actually penniless—that is, supposing that a few hundreds were saved out of the

wreck of his fortune—it would be the same thing in the end.

So before he went back to Colchester—which he did to arrange for the sale of his effects there, having sent in his papers at once when he found out how hopeless the ruin was—he wrote again to Joan Douglas. And this time he did not hesitate to begin—"My darling Joan. You will let me—" he went on—"call you for once by a dear little name which I had thought would go so well with mine one day. It is for the last time, dear. You know—I feel sure you know it—that I love you as I have never loved any woman before, or ever will again. I had thought to make you mine after I had seen your—Major Stewart, but fate has come in between us. Dearest, a terrible misfortune has overtaken me. The last time I was at Dovercourt I had three thousand a year—to-day I have nothing, not even my pay, for I have sent in my papers and have no longer even that pittance. If I had only three or four hundred a year I would have come and asked you to share it, but I can't ask you to share *nothing*."

"I told you, did I not, that my father was a banker? Well, all my property was invested in the bank of which my uncle was the head until a week ago. Utter ruin has come upon him and upon us all, and although I love you, my dear love, I love you too well to wish to drag you down to—God only knows as yet what depths of poverty and privation. You are safe and happy where you are—you have a good home, and they are good to you, are they not? But you must try to forget me, dear, though I shall never forget you.

"I should not have written at all, but I hated to leave you in uncertainty. You might have believed that I had a very different reason for coming no more to Dovercourt, the dear little place where I had so much happiness. But now you know, darling.

"Give my love to my little friends. And now good-by for always, my darling. Till you forget me, I hope you will pray sometimes for your unfortunate but true lover—

"CLIVE DARRELL.

"P.S.—I have given my man instructions

to bring down a little fox-terrier to you. She has been my faithful companion for three years. If you are able to keep her, I hope you will, as a last kindness to me. If you cannot, tell the man who brings her to you, and he will have her destroyed. I shall be gone from Colchester by the time he comes to you.—C. D."

CHAPTER IX.

'LISTED !

When Clive Darrell found himself in London, after learning the fate of the fox-terrier "Victoria," he had about fifty pounds in his pocket, having used the money got from the sale of his horses to pay the few personal debts which had happened to be owing at the time of the wreck of his fortune.

He did not hesitate long as to what he should do. He knew that it would probably be a year, perhaps eighteen months, or it might even be two years, before the affairs of the house of Clive, Walton & Darrell were fully cleared up. What would happen then, Heaven alone knew. The old house might be started again, and in any case there might be a few hundreds or even thousands left after everything was paid up. But our friend had to provide some occupation for

himself during that time. Be as careful as you will, the sum of fifty pounds will not go very far in the keep of a man, more especially if that man happens to have been in possession, up to the time present, of an income of three thousand a year. Besides that Darrell had no taste for an idle life, and he wanted most to try to forget the past—well, both the happy past and the bitter present—and he knew that there was no remedy for sad thoughts so good as that of hard work. And here he was at twenty-four years old, a good soldier so far as his experience went, but, as he told himself, fit for nothing else. Live upon his pay he simply could not; he did not see the fun of exchanging into a West Indian regiment, or even of going to India either with an Infantry or a Native regiment; so in the end, after a few days' cogitation, he paid his hotel bill and took a first-class ticket to York, where he went up to the Cavalry Barracks and enlisted in a home regiment of Dragoon Guards, then quartered there.

And then he began to understand what the word ruin meant. Up to that time it had

been a mere phrase with him ; it became stern reality afterward. He first felt the pinch of the very ugly and unbecoming shoe which it had fallen to his lot to wear, when he asked for the adjutant in just the same tone as he would have asked for him had he been a personal friend and he had only gone to call upon him.

"Mr. Hurst is in the orderly-room just now, sir," the soldier to whom he addressed himself told him — "but he will be going down to the officers' mess in a few minutes. Or shall I tell him you want to see him ? "

"I want to see him here—thanks," Darrell replied.

"What name, sir ? "

"Smith."

The orderly went in, and returning in a minute or so, asked Darrell to follow him. At first he felt far more inclined to turn tail and make a bolt to get away, than to go in and face his equal—or possibly his inferior—in the incognito of John Smith. However, he was a young man of considerable determination, and he crushed down the momentary

weakness and followed the orderly into the office.

The adjutant was sitting at a table in the middle of the room, and looked up inquiringly with a civil "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, sir," said Darrell. "I want to enlist."

The adjutant looked at him sharply from head to foot with keen eyes, noted the strong, well-set-up figure, the good clothes, the neat watch-chain, the big signet-ring on his finger, the fair determined open face, and honest nondescript eyes.

"H'm," he muttered—"Orderly, you can go." The orderly departed. "Now tell me," said the officer, as the door closed—"what do you want to enlist for?"

Darrell stroked his chin reflectively and looked at the officer doubtfully for a moment. "Well, sir," he said at last, "I want to make a living somehow, and I don't think I'm fit for anything else."

"And what makes you think you're fit for that?" the officer demanded.

Darrell drew himself up to his full height and straightened himself, with a smile which

said plainly that he knew his value in a physical sense. The adjutant smiled too.

"Yes, I see," he said. "But I see too that you are a gentleman, and I think that you're an army man. Hadn't you better tell me all the circumstances which have brought you here this morning?"

His tone was so kind that Darrell took the chair to which he pointed and answered his question. "I'll tell you everything, sir," he said—"if I may take it that it goes no further."

"Certainly."

"Not even to the colonel, unless absolutely necessary?"

"Not even to the colonel," the other assured him.

So then Darrell told him the whole story from beginning to end, winding up—"and you see it may be two years before I get a farthing from my property, and I may never get anything at all. I'm fit for nothing else, but I'm a first-rate soldier so far as I go. So I just looked out a home regiment where I wasn't known, and I came straight down here."

"And how if you get a commission?" inquired the other. "You cannot live on your pay then any more easily than you could now."

"Yes—I shall have got used to having no expenses by that time, and I may have got a few thousands of my own which would make all the difference to me. Besides, a ranker never has to spend so much as the others, and anyway, if I find I get nothing from the bank, I needn't accept a commission."

"That's so—and I believe the non-commissioned officers get a rousing good time," observed the adjutant—"all the same it will be a terrible grind for you."

"It will be that in any case," answered Darrell.

"And you're quite determined? You've quite made up your mind?"

"Quite," said Darrell, without a moment's hesitation.

"Well, we shall be very glad of you—I only hope things will all come right for you," said the adjutant, cordially. "I've heard a good deal about you—I wish you were coming to us as an officer."

"Thank you," answered Darrell.

The formalities were soon over after this, and then Darrell's term of what he was accustomed to call penal servitude for the crime of being poor, began. Not that it was a bad sort of life, and his friend the adjutant very soon made use of him in the orderly-room, and so he was saved a good deal of coarse, dirty work over which he had been, with all the good-will in the world, hopelessly incompetent.

But nobody could save him from the coarse cooking, the rough-and-tumble life, the want of a corner to call his own, of a corner where he could spend a spare half-hour without turning out and trailing about the streets or being driven into the canteen—which in a barrack is the beginning and end of all evil.

Still it must be admitted that he got over his change far more easily than he would, at any time before his period of misfortunes, have thought within the bounds of possibility. He was not acutely miserable, and he only actively regretted one part of his past, that was that short time at Dovercourt when

he had learned to love Joan Douglas with the unchangeable, undying love of his life.

He often thought about her, and often he used to go out toward evening and walk right out into the country; so that he might dream of her without being disturbed; to go over that happy time again and again; to recall how near they had been to each other that last night, and how fate seemed to have stepped in to keep them apart; to remember how his dear little friend, Kitty, had enlightened him about Lord Charlie; and—and sometimes to wonder whether Charlie West would end by winning her after all? And generally, when his thoughts got thus far, he used to try to comfort himself with the news which his man, Parkes, had brought him of her, after he had been down to Dovercourt to take the terrier, Victoria, to her.

"What did she say? Did you see Miss Douglas?" he had asked.

"Yes, sir," Parkes replied—"I asked to see the lady and I give her the note and kep' Victoria under my arm.. And the young lady, she read the note and then she just flew at the dorg and caught her out of my

arm, and says she, 'Keep her—the darling—why, of course I'll keep her. Stay, you'd better go down to the kitchen and get some dinner while I write to your master.'

" 'Begging your pardon, miss,' says I—'but it's no use of your writing—Mr. Darrell have left the regiment and gone to London. He particular told me to tell you so.'

"And then the young lady she tipped me half a crown and I come away."

And that was all! That was all! He had not given her the chance of answering his letter, and, indeed, had given Parkes the strictest injunctions that he was not to bring any letter back with him. And yet he was disappointed that he had not done so. He could—to use his own phrase—have punched the idiot's chuckle head for him. But then, what was the good of thinking about it? The British soldier's first orders are to do what he is told—that and that only. So what was the good of expecting him to use his discretion on a subject in which, although of vital importance to his master, he had no interest, and about which he had most likely not troubled himself to think at all?

CHAPTER X.

MEETING.

Nearly a year had gone by. The business of the once great firm of Clive, Walton & Darrell had been taken over by another banking house, and their affairs were being gradually but surely got into order. There seemed to be some prospect that ultimately the wreck would not be so complete as at first had been feared it would be. As yet, however, it was only a prospect, one which might possibly never be realized, so for Clive Darrell the future did not look particularly bright. Still he had become wonderfully well used to the new life, and, excepting that whenever he thought of Joan his heart ached in a dull sort of way for the rest of that day, he had schooled himself to cast very few regrets after his happy and prosperous past.

And of Joan he had never heard one sin-

gle word. He did not even know if she was alive or dead, whether she was still with the Stephenson-Stewarts, or whether she had gone away from them and was earning her living elsewhere. He knew nothing and he tried to find out nothing, although she still reigned supreme and triumphant in his heart, just the same as she had done during those few precious weeks of happiness at the little East Coast watering-place, which would always to him represent the one paradise on earth.

And then something happened to rouse him out of the ordinary routine of his life, something which brought all the past flooding back upon him, he scarcely knew whether as a pleasure or a pain. For the five years' command of the officer commanding the regiment came to an end, and in his place was appointed and gazetted Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Stephenson-Stewart from the Tenth Dragoons.

Colonel Stewart, of course, took up the command when Colonel Cox relinquished it, which was but a few days after the appointment was gazetted. Clive Darrell recog-

nized him in a moment, but the eyes of the new commanding officer passed him over among the others without his having any idea that he had seen him before, and even without seeing the strange likeness which he bore to Lord Charles West.

"I'm safe enough," said Darrell to himself, breathing freely again, as Colonel Stewart passed by him—"he'll never know me, and even if I come face to face with the youngsters they are not very likely to know me either—children have very short memories."

All the same, it came back to him that these same children had remembered Charlie West intimately for more than two years!

During the next week or two little scraps of news concerning the new colonel came floating to him, for everybody in the regiment naturally took the very keenest interest in him and his belongings. Darrell heard from one comrade that the Colonel had taken a large furnished house about half a mile from the barracks, and that distance farther out from the town. From another he heard that the family were coming the following day, several children and a governess, and half a

dozen servants. "I fancy there's no Mrs. Stewart," said his informant, carelessly.

And the next day another soldier, who had been to the station to take charge of the Colonel's baggage, imparted further news to him. "I went down to see after the Colonel's baggage to-day," he told him—"heaps of it, and a whole pack of dogs and cats and birds and such like."

"A lot of children?" asked Darrell.

"A lot—no, several biggish ones—no children—I mean little ones. But uncommonly nice all the same, and tremendously polite."

"Was there a governess?"

"Yes—a French girl—young—couldn't speak a word of English."

Darrell's heart sank within him—then she was gone; well, well, perhaps she was married and settled in a home of her own. Anyway he was safe from the fear—or stay, he meant the pain—of meeting her again.

And yet he was disappointed—bitterly disappointed, in spite of all his brave resolutions and his philosophical endeavors to bear his troubles in uncomplaining patience. Yes, he was undeniably bitterly disappointed.

So the days went on and nothing happened out of the usual every-day course of events; Darrell went about his work in his ordinary way, and very soon got quite used to having frequent intercourse with the Colonel, who never seemed to think for a moment that the particularly intelligent corporal to whom he sometimes gave his instructions in the orderly-room was anything but what he seemed to be, plain John Smith.

Twice he saw his old friends, Kitty and Georgie, on the road between their house and the town, the first time only in the distance, the second so near that he heard Kitty say to the governess, in shockingly bad French—"Il y a une place de l'eau appelé Dovercourt, mamzelle—c'est très jolie—" and then add—"I say, Georgie, *what* fun we had last year at Dovercourt—and what a lovely man Mr. Darrell was."

Darrell stopped short and let them get on in front of him. He had never been so utterly brought, as it were, face to face with his old self since he had enlisted. The suddenness of the incident was almost too much for him, he felt weak and shaken, and as if

he could not pick up the threads of the new life again and go on trying to forget that he had ever been a gentleman with three thousand a year.

Yet after half an hour or so he pulled himself together and shook the old recollection away from him, feeling that he must be strong; that he had marked out a certain line of conduct for himself, and that to abandon it would be to own himself beaten; and Darrell had no idea of that happening to him.

There used to be between the city of York and the Cavalry Barracks a quaint, old-fashioned inn, called "The Light Horseman;" it exists no longer now, at least not in that shape, for a large, staring public-house has taken its place, and has ruined the appearance of that particular bit of road for ever. However, picturesque or not, the grand new house served Darrell's purpose very well just then, for he went in to the bar and asked for a brandy and soda. He felt more like himself when he had drunk it off, and as he was coming out he met the comrade who had told him about the arrival of the new Colonel's children and servants.

"Did you see two children in sailor clothes just now on the road?" he asked of Darrell—"a boy and a girl. Those were some of the Colonel's children, and that was the French governess."

"Yes. I saw them—I guessed it was them," answered Darrell, with rather vague grammar.

"Did you look at the French girl?"

"No, I didn't. I looked at the children," Darrell replied.

"Ah! you should have looked at her," responded Wilson. "By Jove, I never saw such a pair of eyes in my life—black as ink and as big as saucers, and the sweetest little mouth in the world."

Darrell laughed outright. "What, are you regularly hit?"

"Clean done for," returned Wilson, promptly.

"I should give it up. Ten to one she can't speak a word of English, and as you can't speak French, where will you be? Besides—the Colonel's governess—Oh! even if she looks at you there'll be the very devil to pay when it comes out, which it is sure to do."

"Why should it come out?" demanded the other.

"Oh! those children couldn't keep a secret to save their lives," said Darrell, unthinkingly. "They're as open as the day."

"Why, what do you know about them?" the other asked, opening his eyes rather widely.

"Nothing at all," replied Darrell, promptly, seeing that he had almost let the fact of his acquaintance with them slip. "But they are big children, not babies, and you couldn't hoodwink them. The French girl probably never goes out without them, particularly if she happens not to be able to speak English at all—and—and altogether you had best leave that especial young lady alone. Take my advice—there's something in it."

"Well, perhaps there is," Wilson admitted, unwillingly; "but they are eyes—my word, they are, no mistake about it."

They parted company then, and Darrell went on his way toward barracks. He was just crossing the road opposite to the great gates, when two gentlemen in tweed clothes approached from the town, in a little cart

drawn by a small cob. One was an officer of the regiment, and Darrell saluted him, receiving the usual uplifting of the hand in reply; the other, to his horror, was no other than an officer of his old regiment, Ronald McNeil.

Happily McNeil did not even glance in Darrell's direction; indeed, he was reading a letter and did not look up as they drew near to the gates; and just as they passed him, Mr. Denham said something to his companion, who went off in a burst of laughter lasting until they disappeared round the corner of the guard-room. And oh! how the lad's laughter awoke the old echoes in Darrell's heart.

He had now been nearly a year in the Thirtieth Dragoon Guards and, until the arrival of the new commanding officer, he had not seen anyone in the most remote way connected with his old life in the Sixteenth Hussars. Now he felt that the place was getting too hot for him—assuredly he could not go on long, almost running against those who had known Clive Darrell, without being discovered, and discovery to him was almost synonymous with the bitterness of death.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD PAIN COMES AGAIN.

However, the next few days passed by without his being brought into actual contact with McNeil, who naturally did not expect to find Clive Darrell in the guise of a corporal of the Thirtieth Dragoon Guards. Besides this, Darrell had let his moustache grow, which he had never done before, and this had altered his appearance a little.

He saw McNeil several times in the distance, but though he would have given a good deal to have been able to walk up to him and accost him with—"Hallo, Shaver, what's good with you?" he kept resolutely and carefully at as far a distance from him as he possibly could.

But on the morning of the fourth day, when he was hard at work in the office, McNeil came in with the orderly officer for

the day. "Oh! Hurst," he said to the Adjutant, "I think you said you would go over to Linkwater's with me this afternoon?"

"With pleasure—but I can't go till about half-past four," Hurst replied.

"That will be early enough," said the younger man, and began to walk restlessly about the bare, uninteresting room. "I say—are you busy?"

"Not particularly."

"I mean—I needn't be off out of this at once, eh?" McNeil was still so young that he positively loved the official atmosphere of an orderly-room, and vastly preferred staying there with Hurst to enjoying himself in the town or lolling about the deserted ante-room.

Hurst laughed. He knew the feeling of the lad well enough. It is what in the theatrical world is called "so very pro—pro"—and in most cases, both in the Service and on the stage, it wears off after a time.

"Oh! you can stay here for the present, if you want to," Hurst said, easily. "Do you want to write letters or anything? You'll find better pens here, on the whole, than in

the ante-room. There's plenty of regimental paper in that case."

"Ah! thanks. I do want to write a letter or two," McNeil replied, casually, and Darrell, who was sitting at a table with his back turned toward him, bent down and rested his head upon his hand with a feeling of despair. He tried to go on writing the report on which he had been at work when McNeil had come in, but the writing was very shaky and his ears were straining hard to catch every word which would tell him about that old life, in which he had been so utterly happy that he had just let the days slip by one after another without troubling to think how fine a time he was having as he went along.

And how it all came back to him then. McNeil's half-important, would-be careless tone, as if letters usually came to him by the bushel and he could put in an odd hour at any time in answering them a few at a time. Darrell remembered the lad's powers in that way so well—the sprawling school-boy "fist," the letters which usually were just long enough to turn the corner of the first page,

and were generally one part taken up with the name of the recipient, one part signature, the two together amounting to about half of the whole ! Oh ! he remembered it so well.

McNeil meantime had come to an anchorage on the opposite side of the table to the Adjutant. He drew a sheet of paper toward him and put the date just below the stamped address. "Did you ever meet Harris?" he asked, suddenly.

"Of course. I was at Marlborough with him," Hurst replied.

"Ah !—I had a letter from him this morning—he says the Bootblack is married at last. Had a guard of honor at the wedding and all the rest of it. None of the fellows went, of course."

"The Bootblack—that's Moses."

"Yes. Did you ever see him?"

"Oh ! yes—I was staying at Colchester last year and saw him. I was staying with Cholmondeley of the Third."

"Ah ! yes. Well, he couldn't stand living in Coventry any longer, so he went and got married—married a lady, too, that's the extraordinary part of it."

"Who was she?"

"A Miss Masters—quite a pretty girl, and nice too. Took it into her head that the Bootblack was shamefully treated, and married him to prove that she had the courage of her opinions. God help her, I say," McNeil ended, solemnly.

It was really by a great effort that Darrell kept himself from turning round with a "Hollo, Shaver, my boy, you're getting on; 'pon my word you are." For a few minutes he almost forgot that he was Clive Darrell no longer, but Corporal Smith, very much at the service of others just then. The Adjutant's voice recalled him quickly enough.

"Oh! perhaps he may make a very decent sort of husband. I suppose he's rich."

"Rich—yes, the brute, and just as stingy as he's rich, which is saying a good deal. Well," with a sigh—"we've had a good deal of fun out of the Bootblack, but I suppose it's all over now—there's no getting any fun out of a married fellow, especially when his wife has taken up the cudgels for him. Still we've had fine times—we really oughtn't to grumble at his escape."

"Ah! poor devil, I've no doubt he did have a bad time of it. The Sixteenth pride themselves on being a lively lot."

"We used to," returned McNeil, gravely—and Darrell, although he was hearing every word with agony, could have laughed aloud as he heard him—"we used to. Of course Harris is a lively sort of chap, and we've a very fair time still, but somehow it's been different lately. You see, Darrell was the one that kept us all up to the mark. Did you ever meet Darrell?"

"No—I don't remember him," returned the Adjutant, who was standing at the window now with his back to McNeil. He had forgotten that the Corporal was sitting writing at the table by the wall—pretending to write, that is. Nor did he at that moment remember that he was actually the man of whom they were speaking. "No, I don't remember him," he said, absently.

"Ah! he was a proper sort of chap," McNeil went on, regretfully—"quite the best out and out all-round good fellow I ever knew; the regiment was never the same after he left it."

"Perhaps your friend, Mr. Moses, does not think so," suggested Hurst.

"Oh! well, Darrell never had much to do with the Bootblack beyond christening him," McNeil answered. "You see, Darrell was this kind of a man—If he liked a fellow he'd lead him an awful dance; but if he didn't like a man, he'd let him alone. And he didn't like the Bootblack, and never took any notice of him except officially. But he was such a good sort in himself, the best old chap in the world, and when he came to smash there wasn't a man in the regiment who wouldn't have done anything to help him to tide over the bad time. Unfortunately, though, he never gave any of us the chance of even telling him how sorry we were for his misfortunes. He just sent in his papers, and not one of us liked to say a word about what had happened to him."

"And what had happened to him?" inquired the Adjutant, still half-thinking of something else.

"Oh! he lost all his money at one swoop in a bank smash—his people were bankers, and his money was invested in the concern,"

McNeil replied—"and when he left the regiment he simply disappeared—I haven't the smallest idea what became of him—in fact, I'd give anything to know."

The Adjutant suddenly awoke with a start to a recollection of Corporal Smith's identity. He wheeled round from the window with the intention of going into the outer room, where the Corporal usually worked, and saw that he was still just where he had been while he had been working under his immediate direction. "Good Heavens," his thoughts ran—"and the poor beggar has had to sit here all the time listening to a lot of details about himself which must have been agony to him—" and in truth Hurst could have bitten his tongue off in his annoyance at having gossiped thus freely with McNeil, and for the pain their careless talk must have given to Darrell.

"Corporal—I shall not want you any more," he said, aloud.

McNeil looked up as the Corporal went out—"I had quite forgotten that anyone else was there," he said, in mild surprise—"pon my word, Hurst, you must bless me

for coming in interrupting you like this. Why didn't you tell me to go? You see, I got on talking about the Bootblack and poor old Darrell."

For a moment a wild impulse swept over the Adjutant's mind that he would tell McNeil the truth, tell him that Darrell had been sitting there hearing every word that he had said, without, in a measure, being able to help it or take himself out of hearing.

Then he remembered—and but just in time—that Darrell's secret was his own, that he was bound in honor to divulge nothing of it, and that he was bound in mercy to do what he could to help Darrell to keep out of McNeil's way if he wished to do so.

"It's best not to talk about ourselves before any of the men," he said, a little stiffly—and he felt as if he was doing something inexpressibly mean in thus speaking to McNeil of his old comrade—"but, like you, I had forgotten that anyone was there."

"Ah! yes, you're right," rejoined the lad, carelessly; "of course I wouldn't have mentioned one of your officers for the world. But as the man didn't know either the Bootblack

or poor old Darrell, there's no great harm done, I dare say."

"No—well, one never knows. By the by, how long is it since Darrell left?"

"About a year," answered the other—"and he was a good sort—I'd give anything to see him again."

"Ah!—h'm! Well, it's a pity when the best man in a regiment goes wrong," said Hurst; "but if a man happens to lose his fortune, what's he to do? He can't live on his pay—in this country, at all events."

McNeil betook himself out of the orderly-room a few minutes afterward, and then the Adjutant called for an orderly, and told him to find Corporal Smith—he wanted him at once.

In less than five minutes Darrell appeared, with a quick look round the room to make sure that the Adjutant was alone.

"You wanted me, sir?" he said.

"Yes—shut the door."

Darrell closed the door and waited for what his superior might have to say.

"You heard what passed just now, Darrell," said the Adjutant, not looking at him.

"Yes," answered Darrell, dropping the 'Corporal Smith' manner in obedience to the officer's tone and way of addressing him.

"I was thinking about something else half the time," Hurst went on—"and had forgotten that anyone else was here. And I forgot altogether that he was actually talking about you all the time. You heard what he said?"

"Oh! yes—I couldn't help myself," Darrell answered.

"Do you want to keep out of his way or would you like to see him?" the Adjutant asked; "I'll lend him my room if you'd like him to see you."

"I shouldn't—I wouldn't for the world," put in Darrell, hastily. "It's awfully good of you, but it is far the best to be forgotten, or only be remembered as I was. I don't want to be pitied—I can't stand being pitied—it's bad enough without that."

"And you have found it bad, Darrell?" the Adjutant said; "I quite thought you were getting on——"

"Very well, indeed, sir," rejoined Darrell, hastily, "but still it's not exactly the life

I've been used to, and it's a long drop from the officers' mess to the ranks—I have to thank you, and I do thank you with all my heart, for putting me on to office-work and saving me a lot of rough work that I am no good at. Yet at times I really do feel as if I would just as soon put a bullet through my head as worry on any longer. And just now I'm not very well, and I couldn't stand McNeil talking all my affairs over. He's a good lad and a nice lad enough, but a little of him went a long way unless you had nothing to do and were perfectly clear in your head. If it had happened to be Harris instead of McNeil, I don't think I would have been able to resist having a yarn with him."

"Very well," said the Adjutant, "I will respect your wishes; I believe he goes away to-morrow or the next day."

"Thank you, sir," said Darrell, returning to Corporal Smith again, and with a salute went out of the office.

The Adjutant sat down at the table to write a letter, but Darrell's strained white face came so often between him and the pa-

per, that at last he threw down the pen and sat there thinking about the strange fate which had fallen upon the life of this man, had taken him from the pleasant, comfortable lines in which he had been born, and had flung him down where he could have none of those good things which had aforetime made his life. What a strange fate? and how plucky the poor chap had been all through, and was still. None knew better than Hurst the temptation it must have been to him to take the chance of an hour's talk with an old comrade, to shake himself free for once of the position of corporal and feel himself for a brief space of time back in his old place again.

Well, well, he was resolute and plucky, bound to get on, the officer's thoughts ran—and he, for one, would respect him all the more that he had accepted his adversity as uncomplainingly as he had done.

And at that moment, Clive Darrell was lying face down among the grass of the Low Moor, sobbing passionately as if his very heart would break.

Not that the storm lasted long! After

half an hour or so he took up the burden of life again and went on his way, so that none knew how near to desolation he had been.

And on the following day he saw McNeil go gayly off with his portmanteau and his hat-box, and he knew that from that danger he was safe for the present.

About this time the regiment was rather more harder-worked than usual—the time of inspection was looming in the not far distance, the commanding officer was naturally anxious and eager to have everything up to the mark, or, as Darrell heard one trooper grumble to another, “New brooms do sweep so blooming clean, it’ll be a wonder to me if we’ve got any of our skins whole by the time leave begins.” And Darrell had his share of extra grind like all the others.

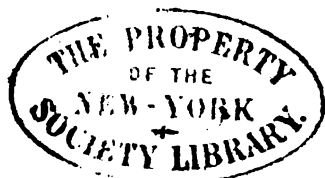
Not that he minded. He was satisfied so long as he got his hour or two hours’ sharp walk in the early evening, and as in August the streets of the historic—nay, I might almost say the pre-historic—city are more like a huge brick oven than a place of rest and recreation, Darrell generally turned sharply to the left when he had passed through the

barrack-gates, and struck out in the direction of the still fresh and smiling country lanes.

And it happened one day that he had been off at least an hour earlier than usual and was on his way home again, when just as he got near to the pretty village of Fulford he noticed a young lady coming to meet him accompanied by a little dog.

What took place next happened all in a moment, for the little dog stopped short with nose in air and one front-paw held off the ground; then it gave a sharp whining bark and flung itself upon Darrell with a thousand tokens of wild affection and welcome.

"Victoria—Victoria," the young lady cried, "Victoria—*Victoria!* Don't be afraid," she said to Darrell, seeing that Victoria took not the smallest notice of her—"it's only play—she won't hurt you—Oh!—oh! it is you—Mr. Darrell—*Clive!*"



CHAPTER XII.

"YOU MAY KISS ME."

It was a very quiet lane in which Darrell and Joan Douglas met again. There were houses at the end of it, the end which turned into the village, but these houses did not have a good view of that part of the road where these two met. I do not know that the fact of there being not a single soul in sight had anything to do with Darrell's demeanor on that occasion, but I do know that when he found Joan Douglas clinging to him, her great gray eyes ablaze with love, his name upon her lips, and Victoria frantically dancing around them both, I do know that the situation was too much for him altogether, and that he quite forgot that he was no longer, to all practical purposes, Clive Darrell, but John Smith, Corporal of the Thirtieth Dragoon Guards, and that he took

Miss Douglas in his arms and kissed her over and over again with little fond ejaculations thrown in—"My love—my darling—Joan—Joan—dearest—dearest."

At last, however, he came back to himself and half-pushed her away from him. "What have I to do with you?" he cried—"look at me," with a gesture toward the uniform which clothed him.

Joan Douglas smiled up at him. "Well, I do look at you; I haven't looked at you half enough yet; but I see that you are just the same, except that you've grown a moustache, which doesn't become you half so well as your shaven lip."

There was a seat by the roadside, just a wooden plank on two supports, and Miss Douglas sat down and patted it with her hand to show that she wished him to sit there also. "Come and sit here, Clive—I have so much to tell you."

But he did not sit down just then. "Oh, my dear!" he cried, "don't speak to me like that—I——"

"Well?" she asked. "You—? Go on—I am waiting."

"Don't you realize what has happened to me?" he exclaimed. "Don't you realize that I am only a Corporal of Dragoons now—little better than a trooper—that if a ruined Clive Darrell was not good enough for you——"

"*I never said so,*" she interposed, quietly.

"No, because you are too good, too true, to say *any* thing that would hurt me or wound me," he cried.

"You never gave me the chance of doing either," she put in—"don't forget that."

"I gave you the chance of sending Victoria back again," he said, brokenly.

"Yes, at the cost of her poor little life—Oh! how could you? And since we are on the subject, I think I may as well tell you that I think, and I always have thought, that it was exceedingly unkind of you to go away without even giving me the chance of proving myself a heroine, if I wanted to do so."

"I did what I thought was best," he said, meekly.

"Yes, but you should have let me have some say in such a question too," she rejoined,

quickly—"you would have spared me many a heartache, I can assure you."

He was beside her on the seat in a moment. "Joan, my dear little love, has your heart ached?" he cried, tenderly—"I am so sorry, so sorry. What do you think, then, that my life has been all these weary months? Oh! my little love, a very hell of misery and regret."

He looked so wan and worn and haggard, in spite of the joy of seeing her again, that the girl drew his hand to her and held it against her heart with a tender murmur of comforting and reassuring words. And the little dog Victoria had jumped upon the seat and climbed jealously upon his knee, where she sat with her bright eyes turning first upon Darrell and then upon Joan, as if her cup of joy was full to the brim and running over, and she hardly knew how to express sufficiently her satisfaction at seeing the two of them together again.

"You have been wretched and unhappy—I can see it in your face," she said, tenderly—"my poor boy. But it is all over now. You won't go away and lose yourself again, Clive, promise me that."

"I cannot go away and lose myself, unless I buy myself out and throw over soldiering a second time," he said, rather bitterly. "When I parted from you at Dovercourt, I was practically a free agent, but now it is like the Centurion's servant—they say to me—'Go,' and I go—or 'Come,' and I come. I can't get out of your way now, however much I want to do it."

"But you don't want to get out of my way, Clive, do you?" she asked, yearningly.

"I ought to want it," he answered; "and if I were a man, a real man, I should remember always that there is a great difference between us—that I am only a corporal of——"

But there she stopped him. "Look here," she said—"I want to put a very plain question to you. When this little thing"—laying her hand upon Victoria's sleek little head—"saw you just now, did she stop to consider whether you wore the uniform of a Lieutenant of Hussars or of a Corporal of Dragoons? Now tell me that."

"No, of course not, but then——"

"Then do you credit me with less feeling than a dog?" she cried, half indignantly.

Darrell caught her close to his heart with a passionate cry—which answered the question without any need of words; the movement brought complete shipwreck to poor little Victoria, who was, however, very complacent and began to bark with all her might and main, to run to and fro, inviting them both to games and romps, and failing to attract their attention, she jumped up on the seat again and artfully insinuated her little body between them and gasped for breath, as if her exertions had been too much for her.

"I had not the smallest idea of seeing you ever again," Joan said presently, when Darrell had given in and resigned himself to the delight of being with her; "but you—why, you must have known that you would see me before long."

"No, I didn't."

"But you knew that Colonel Stewart had got the command of the Thirtieth?"

"Yes, but I did not know that you would be here," he replied.

She turned and looked at him—wonder and amazement plainly written on her face. "But, Clive, where did you think I should be?" she asked.

"Well," he said, "you can understand that the new Colonel and his belongings were very well talked over in the regiment, and you can understand, too, that being interested in them, I was more than willing to hear any news concerning him and his that came in my way—and the man that went to look after the baggage at the station told me that there was a French governess."

"Well?"

"Well—it didn't occur to me that there would be two," he said, simply.

"Two governesses?" she said, questioningly.

"Yes," he answered.

"No, I suppose not," a queer little smile curling about her lips. "Well, Clive, you see here I am, like a bad shilling, turned up again. You thought, I dare say, that I had gone out into the world, after quarrelling with my employer, to seek my fortune; but here I am, and—putting her hand in his—

"you will never be able to get rid of me any more."

His hand closed over hers, but he looked at her with a perplexed gaze. "Dearest," he said, "you must be fed, you must be clothed, you must have a roof to shelter you. Then, how is it to be done? I'm a poor half-hearted sort of chap; if I was worth my salt I should have made a fortune for you by this time. But I'm not—I'm a Corporal in Her Majesty's service, and, unless you are content to use your influence with Colonel Stewart to be put on the strength of the regiment, I don't see how it's to be done—I don't, indeed."

"Oh! I think it can be managed better than that," she said, quietly. "Colonel Stewart will be able to suggest something—he's a wonderful man. Ah! Clive, what a pity you didn't fall in love with an heiress instead of a poor governess—or, what a still greater pity," seeing that he made an energetic gesture of dissent, "that I was not an heiress. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do," he answered, promptly; "but since you are not, and I have lost my whole

fortune, the question still remains the question, how are you going to live? I am housed, clothed, and fed after a fashion by a grateful country, but I fear the strength of the regiment is not for you, darling, even as a last resource."

"Well, we will see. You will go back with me to the house?"

"I will do anything that you wish," he replied.

"And I will take you to Colonel Stewart—by the by, how is it he has never recognized you?"

"I don't know; I have taken instructions from him almost every day."

"Ah! he was not expecting to see you—that is it," she said, calmly, as if it was quite an every-day thing for him to be a corporal instead of an officer. "Well, you must tell him that I wish to be married to you, and that you don't see your way to it. Do you see?"

"I hear what you say, yes," he answered.

"That is all that is necessary," she said, smiling. "I have great faith in Colonel Stewart. He is the kindest man in the

world. Very likely he will ask you if you want to marry me. I suppose you do?"

"Oh! Joan!" he cried; he was almost hurt that she could joke on such a subject, but Joan was too truly glad and gay even to mind that. She rose to her feet and held out her hand.

"Come, let us go," she replied; "the sooner the interview is over the better for all of us."

"Stay," he cried; "how do you know that the Colonel won't bundle me out of the house neck and crop for my presumption?"

"Do you think," she replied, "that I did not show him your letter, the last one? Of course I did. Why, our letters had been full of you, the children could talk of nothing else when he came, and then—why, of course I showed him your letter, and I know what he will say to you. Oh! he will suggest something, never fear." So together they walked along the lane and through the village to the house where the Stewarts lived. They met two ladies on the way who bowed a little stiffly when they saw Miss Douglas walking on evidently familiar terms with

what they called "a common soldier." And almost before the smiles which their sour expressions had brought to Joan's face had died away they met three of the officers, whose consternation was ludicrous until one suddenly said to the others—"Depend upon it, she's known him before. I always thought Smith was a gentleman—he speaks French like a native." And then they reached the house and Joan rang the bell.

"Is the Colonel in, James?" she asked of the butler.

"Yes, ma'am—in the library," James answered.

"Come along," said Joan, but stopped at the door of the library and (James having disappeared) held up her sweet face to his. "You may kiss me, Clive," she said, and Darrell kissed her.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MY OWN."

A moment later Miss Douglas opened the door and went into the room. The master of the house was sitting in an easy-chair, with a cigarette in his mouth and a newspaper in his hand. He looked up in some surprise to see her come in followed by a corporal of his regiment.

"Is anything the matter, Joan?" he asked.

"Nothing at all," she replied; "but you remember my telling you about a Mr. Clive Darrell, of the Sixteenth Hussars? Well, this is Mr. Clive Darrell."

"But surely," exclaimed the Colonel, jumping up—surely this is Corporal Smith?"

"Who is Clive Darrell *incognito*," said Joan, quietly. "He wants to ask your advice, so I will leave you together."

As the door closed behind her, Colonel Stewart turned to Darrell and held out his hand. "I ought to have known you, Darrell," he said, kindly—"but 'pon my word, the idea never occurred to me. Sit down, my dear fellow, and forget the Corporal Smith business and tell me—what is it?"

"Miss Douglas tells me, sir, that she showed you a letter of mine about a year ago," Darrell began.

"Yes, she did—a very manly, straightforward letter it was, too. I was exceedingly sorry for you."

"Well, sir—until an hour ago I had not any idea that Miss Douglas was still with you——"

"Oh! you thought she had forgotten you and married somebody else, eh?"

"No, sir, I did not think that, although, of course, I knew that such a thing was possible. But I knew—I heard that your children had got a French governess, and I confess it never suggested itself to me that you might be likely to have two."

"Two what?" said the Colonel, in a puzzled way.

"Two governesses, of course, sir," answered Darrell, promptly.

"Two governesses—Why, what are you talking about?" exclaimed the Colonel, bluntly. "I haven't got two governesses—one's nuisance enough to drag about the country, in all conscience. Why, bless me, man, you don't mean to tell me that you have believed all this time that Joan is my children's governess?"

"Certainly I did," Darrell replied.

"Then that explains one part of your letter, neither she nor I could understand it. Well, she doesn't happen to be my little folks' governess—but I don't know that that makes any difference. And I suppose you want to be married, eh?"

"Of course I do, sir—but I don't see what we are to be married on. She must be clothed and fed and housed, and I don't see how a corporal can provide for her as she is accustomed to be provided for," said Darrell, anxiously. "She would have me come to you, but I don't see what good it will do. She is sure that you will be able to suggest something, although, as I have told

her, it must be impossible for you to suggest anything feasible excepting putting her on the strength of the regiment—not that that is a particularly feasible suggestion either."

"Well, scarcely," said the other, smiling—then looked at him for a moment. "Look here, Darrell," he said—"there's one thing I can do which Miss Joan might have done herself, but instead has left me to do for her. *I can tell you the truth.*"

"Well, sir?" said Darrell, who had no idea of what was coming.

"In the first place," said Colonel Stewart, very distinctly, "Miss Joan Douglas is an arrant little humbug."

"Sir!" cried Darrell, fiercely.

"Oh! yes, I know. Fire up as much as you like, my boy, but it's true, all the same. She palmed herself off as my children's governess——"

"Nothing of the kind, sir, she never spoke on the subject."

"Then how did you get hold of the idea?"

"From the children themselves. They

told me that she lived with you, and that she taught them, and I——”

“You put two and two together and made a mistake—it happens sometimes. But Madam Joan is a humbug, nevertheless.”

“How?”

“Didn’t she bring you in here that you might ask me for advice, that I might suggest how to provide bread and butter for her? Yes. Well, then, Joan Douglas is my ward—that is why she has lived with us ever since her father died. She taught the children by her own wish, and because we hadn’t room for a governess at Aldershot. And, as she has fifteen hundred a year of her own, the little humbug will be able to live very comfortably on her own money.”

“But I can’t——” Darrell began, with a gasp.

“You can’t live on your wife’s money! Why not? You expected the poor governess to live on yours, didn’t you? Then where’s the difference?”

“I did not mean that exactly, sir,” returned Darrell, “but a corporal——”

“Oh! well, I certainly don’t advise you

to remain in the Thirtieth; it would be awkward for me and for her too, to say nothing of yourself. But that is a matter that is easily remedied. The only pity is that you did not go down to Dovercourt and *tell* Joan everything instead of writing; it would have been much better, because then you need not have left the Sixteenth at all. Still it's no use grizzling over that now—be thankful that everything has come right so soon; you know it might never have come right at all."

"Thank God," said Darrell, reverently, "for that."

The Colonel got up and put his hand kindly on Darrell's shoulder—"I'll send her to you—I dare say she's hanging about on tenterhooks waiting to be sent for. Darrell, I congratulate you—you're a lucky fellow, for Joan is a girl in a thousand, aye, in a million. I never—" with a short sigh—"knew but one woman that I thought more highly of."

"Thank you, sir," murmured Darrell, huskily.

A moment later the door opened and Joan

came in. Darrell was standing at a window, looking into the garden.

"Clive!" she said, softly.

He turned round with a start—"My dearest," he answered.

"You are not going to send me away for deceiving you?" she said.

"I don't think so."

"It was for such a short time—I hardly knew what you meant at first. And you don't mind my having a little money?"

"Yes, I do," he said, with a laugh—"but I have compromised myself so completely, I suppose I cannot get out of it now."

"Do you want to get out of it?"

"No," he said, honestly, "I don't."

"You'll sell out to-morrow?" she asked.

"You forget," he said—"corporals don't sell out or send in their papers—they buy themselves off."

"Then you'll buy yourself off to-morrow?"

"Certainly I will."

"And you'll shave off that moustache—I don't like it. It makes you look more like Lord Charlie."

"But he hasn't one."

"He has now."

"Oh! And when did you see him?"

"I have seen him often lately."

"Tell me, Joan," he said—"how was it you didn't marry Charlie West?"

"Because—oh! I don't know—because I did not want to marry him."

"That is a woman's reason."

"But it is the best reason in the world. Oh! here are the children."

Kitty came in followed by Georgie. "Father said somebody was here," Kitty explained—"Why, it's Lord Charlie—or—it's Mr. Darrell. Oh! Mr. Darrell, why are you wearing that uniform? It's not your own, is it?"

"Yes, Kitty, it is," he replied. "Don't you like it?"

"Not much—you've got a moustache."

"That's my own, too," smiling at her.

"I thought Joan had sent you away. She's so unkind to people, particularly to nice men," Kitty remarked—"that's the worst of Joan."

"Don't you say anything against Joan," laughed Darrell.

"But why not? It's true," the child cried.

"Why not?" repeated Darrell. "Why, because Joan's my own too."



THE END.



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